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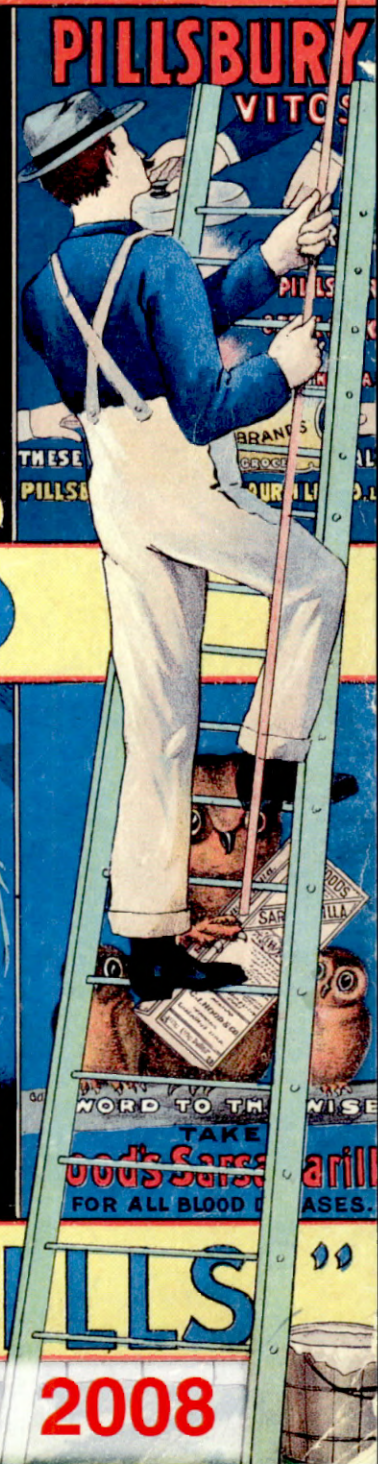
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BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Vol. 52. No. 3

MAY-JUNE 2008

FRED D. PFENING, JR.

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

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THE FRONT COVER

The front and back covers of this *Bandwagon* are the front and back covers of the May 1902 issue of *Bill Poster Display Advertising* magazine, the journal of the Associated Billposters and Distributors of the United States and Canada, an outdoor advertising trade group founded in 1891. The Courier Company of Buffalo, New York created and printed these lithographed images which reproduced examples of their product. Courier also had fancy display ads on the inside front and back covers.

This particular issue was 56 pages with the lead article being "Power of the Poster," by Louis E. Cooke, then general agent of the Buffalo Bill Wild West. Along with a few additional circus features, the articles included news from local billposters, an inside look at the Federal Lithograph Company, and an overview of theatrical posters. It also contained a list of association members and the rates they charged for posting.

Original magazine in Pfening Archives.

NEW CHS TRUSTEES AND OFFICERS

By resolution adopted on February 6, 2008 the Board of Trustees ("Board") of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. ("Society") expanded the Board by four members. Joe Parker of Dallas, Texas and Robert Cline of Cheraw, South Carolina were elected by the Trustees to fill two of the positions, effective February 6, 2008. Both are to serve as Trustees until their successors are duly elected and take office pursuant to the next quadrennial election of Trustees in 2009.

The other two Trustee positions were not filled and are to be held open and in abeyance until further action by the Board.

Alan Campbell, the Society's previous Secretary-Treasurer resigned from those positions effective April 30, 2008. The Trustees decided to split those positions and to elect dif-

BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES

1968-All but Jan.-Feb.
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.
1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.
1972-All available.
1973-All but Nov.-Dec.
1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.
1975-All available.
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.
1978-All available.
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.
1980-1986-All available.
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.
1988-2008-All available.

In addition to above many other issues are available going back to the 1960s. If you are in need of early issues write to the Editor.

Price is \$4.00 each. Add \$2.50 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES

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ferent person to fill each. Accordingly, by the same aforesaid resolution the Trustees elected Robert Cline as the Society's Secretary and Joe Parker, as the Society's Treasurer, both to take office on May 1, 2008 and to serve in those capacities until their successors are duly elected and take office pursuant to the next quadrennial election of Officers in 2009.

NEW MEMBERS

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Harold (Hal) Guyon, Jr. 13 Shaftsbury Rd. Columbia, SC 29209	4502

Nickel Plate Harris and His Circus

By Tom Parkinson

Introduction

The following manuscript was found among the Tom Parkinson papers at the Circus World Museum. It is clearly a first draft as virtually every paragraph has additions, deletions, and corrections. As noted below, the historian George Chindahl directed Parkinson to Clara Harris Wilson, a daughter of W. H. Harris. She had in her possession a ledger detailing the daily receipts and other information for almost every date the show played from its founding in 1883 until mid-season 1903. She also shared her childhood recollections of traveling with the show. The ledger's whereabouts today are unknown. In the late 1990s I had contact with Clara Wilson's son, then an older man, who gave me a number of photographs and clippings relating to the Harris show, but no ledger. One hopes that some day the next generation of the Wilson family will donate this valuable document to an institution where it can be studied by researchers.

The article was written between 1957 and 1972, probably in the early 1960s. Other projects intervened and Parkinson never got back to polishing up the manuscript before his death in 1993. While remaining true to what Parkinson set down, this article has been augmented with material unavailable to him at the time he wrote this, mainly newspaper reviews of the show and details of the 1904 sale to William P. Hall.

While converting late 19th and early 20th century dollars into their 2007 equivalent is inexact, if not misleading, I have made a stab at doing so by putting the current value of the money in the Harris ledger in brackets immediately following the original amount. While at best only a rough approximation, the bracketed numbers give the reader some idea of the size of the Harris Nickel Plate if it were operating today. I have used the web site www.measuringworth.com in converting numbers. Fred D. Pfening III



On July 4, 1872, the 30 year old Harris gave this portrait of himself to his father. On it Harris wrote: "To my Father with the warmest wishes of his affectionate son. W. H. Harris." All illustrations from Pfening Archives unless otherwise indicated.

Clara and William Harris in the early 1870s before he entered the circus business.



The way Dan Castello figured in the creation of the Harris Nickel Plate Circus had all the earmarks of a typical promotion of fresh money to start a new show. The wizened old circus pro found Chicago shirt maker W. H. Harris with a latent yen for circus and some willing money.

In this case the outcome was good, but perhaps not what Castello expected. Harris quickly learned the ways of a winning showman and stayed with it. Castello, who had earlier joined with W. C. Coup and P. T. Barnum to start the great Barnum show, lived out his old age and retirement on the Harris Nickel Plate Circus.

Very little was known about his show until the late historian George L. Chindahl put me in touch with Clara Harris Wilson, daughter of W. H. Harris. She kindly answered multitudes of questions and allowed me the use of family and circus records.

William H. Harris, born at Cookeville, Canada West, in 1841, got his first taste of the show business as a 13-year-old displaying stereopticon slides in schools. By 1859 he was operating a dry goods store at Hoonby, Canada, and in 1861 he moved to Chicago where he lasted one day as a grain merchant. Then he became a biller for Prof. W. J. McAllister's Specialty Company in the Midwest. Harris formed his own traveling variety show at Cincinnati and soon folded it at Kokomo. In 1864 he was back in Chicago, first as a glassware packer and then as a partner in the Harris & Brockway billposting business.

Harris married Clara Sargent in 1867, and at his wife's urging he set up a "gents' furnishings" store two years later at 301 South Clark Street, Chicago. Soon they had a branch at 112 West Randolph, and grossed \$100,000 the first year, or so it was claimed later. Their success was the

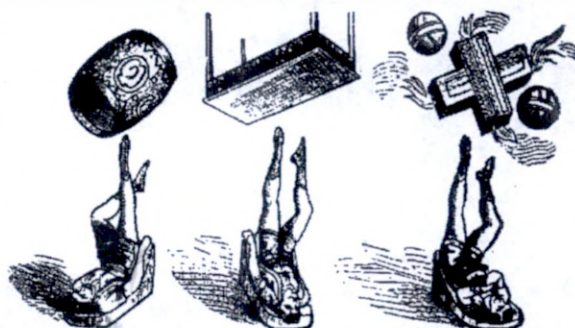
Will Exhibit at
Helena, July 2d, 3d and 4th.

DAN. CASTELLO'S New Colossal Nickel Plate Circus

And Great International Allied Attractions.

THE GREATEST CIRCUS EXHIBITION EVER PERFECTED or CONCEIVED

The Top of the Ladder of Fame; overhauling all Competition; challenging all rivalry in Equestrian and Gymnastics.



Dan Castello will Forfeit \$20,000

To any Circus Manager that can duplicate the same acts as performed in the

Great Nickle Plate Circus.

See the great Stud of performing Horses, led by

"Senator"

The only Circusian Trick Horse under the Canopy of Heaven, and the handsomest that trod God's green earth. \$10,000 in gold coin for single-jump.

The Most Marvelous Performers

On the face of the globe, unrivaled by the peerless, pre-eminent, phenomenal and only

Dan Castello,

The king of trans-Atlantic arenas, whirling plaudits from all nations, his equal not known, to imitate him is past adventure; the superior, the greatest, the world acknowledged only living clown will surely appear.

Each Performance Providing over three Hours Solid Fun.

LAMONDE,

The great acrobat, will make an outside ascent to the top of the world's tallest and single telegraph wire 150 feet in length, at 1 p. m.

Two performances daily. Afternoon at 2 o'clock. Evening at 8. Doors open one hour earlier.



Newspaper ad from Nickel Plate's first season of 1883 when it used the Dan Castello title.

result of hard work on the part of both, for although their stores were called haberdasheries, they actually seem to have been operating a shirt factory. And it was Mrs. Harris who

did much of the work in cutting shirts.

Harris sold his billposting business to George Treyser of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1870. This proved a mistake as not only the two Harris stores but also their home were lost in the great Chicago Fire of 1871. In the frantic moments before their property was lost to the flames, Mrs. Harris raced into the shirt shop-but what she chose to rescue was only a yardstick. Harris, in partnership with M. R. Cobb, reopened in 1872 and Cobb bought the business in 1879.

That was when Harris entered into another partnership to form the Favorite Egg Case Company. His partner appears to have been the most successful and least ethical of the several Harris had because soon the future circus man realized that he had been swindled out of \$26,000 and had only some worthless patents to show for it. This being the dawn of the egg case business, however, Harris found another patent and partner and went on to success with the National Egg Carrier Company.

Meanwhile, old Dan Castello had made a name for himself in the circus business. He had been a clown with Spalding and Rogers, Howes

and Cushing, and other shows. On May 10, 1869 the golden spike was driven into the ground to complete the first transcontinental railroad. The first through train from Omaha carried James M. Nixon who was there to scout the territory. He was a partner with Castello and Egbert Howes in Dan Castello's Great Circus and Menagerie. Starting at Omaha on May 26-27, the company followed the Union Pacific, appearing at Denver, Cheyenne, Salt Lake City, Reno, Sacramento, and San Francisco, among other towns, venturing from the railroad as a wagon circus when necessary. Castello was the star of the show, leaping over nine horses as part of his act. Most of the circus was sold in California, and Castello returned to his home in Racine, Wisconsin to form a new Dan Castello Circus with William C. Coup as partner. It moved by wagon and a Great Lakes steamer in 1870.

Then in 1871, Castello and Coup, flush from a successful tour of the Great Lakes, induced P. T. Barnum to join them to form the P. T. Barnum Circus. The Castello-Coup-Barnum partnership ended after the 1875 season. In 1876 Castello had a show out under his own name.

Then, like so many other Americans, he went west to seek his fortune in a quartz mine in North Dakota. By 1879 he was back in the show business, promoting one J. M. Hudson of Pana, Illinois into bankrolling the Hudson and Castello Circus. In 1881 this troupe claimed 21 railroad cars. It was no great success. The next year he was with an obscure offering called the Great European Circus and Menagerie, touring the Iowa sticks. Then in the fall of 1882 Castello, at liberty and between angels once again, wandered into Chicago.

How he found Harris isn't documented, but a show promoter rarely has trouble finding potential backers. He was enthusiastic about taking a circus to the Pacific Northwest. The Northern Pacific Railroad was just then being completed, and Castello, doubtless remembering success on the Union and Central Pacific in 1869, saw dollar signs in that virgin territory. Harris, with capital from his egg case business, was

game. They established quarters at Benton Harbor, Michigan where Castello broke horses and other stock. Harris, still in Chicago, accumulated wardrobe and other necessities, mainly money, for the new enterprise. Later he wrote: "Everything being brand, sparkling new, from top to bottom, and I, not a dollar in debt, concluded it was 'Nickel Plate' and it has remained so ever since." Thus it became known as the Nickel Plate Shows.

Either because of Castello's greater fame and drawing power, or initial domination in the partnership, the show was first called Dan Castello's New Colossal Nickel Plate Circus and Great International Allied Attractions. Harris was proprietor and Castello equestrian director. J. H. Hanson was general agent; and C. H. Potter, C. H. Brooks, and William Sloman were agents. E. R. Richards was treasurer; C. Van Dusen, steward; and D. Ling, boss canvas man.

The talent and their weekly wages included the Three Belmonts, \$90 [\$1808]; Three Marvels of Peru, \$100 [\$2010]; John Barry, \$25 [\$502]; Jule Kent, \$25; Charles Hardin, \$10 [\$201]; Scott and LaMondue, \$40 [\$804]; Harry Castello, \$5 [\$100]; Frank Elliott, \$3 [\$60]; Charley Goin, \$3; Heenley Brothers, \$40; and John and May Manning \$25.

May 5, 1883, opening day at Benton Harbor, was a "nice day," but business was "one fifth that expected," Harris was to say. That being the case, his expectations were high and he was not to meet them for a long time because at Benton Harbor the show took in \$330.85 [\$6649]. The lot cost \$5 and there was no expense for either license or newspaper ads. Income was terrible at Bangor, \$193 [\$3879]; and South Haven, \$162 [\$3256]; and at Holland, Michigan on May 9 the circus had bad weather that caused a blow down. Personnel worked all night to get the show untangled and loaded; and Harris could count only \$114 [\$2291] for the day. Muskegon on May 11 grossed \$416 [\$8360], but lot, license and advertising were so costly as to trim that to only \$245 [\$4924]. May 21 at East Saginaw was lost because of cold, wintry weather

with hurricane winds; the train wasn't even unloaded. Marquette, Michigan on the 28th grossed \$739.89 [\$14,870], giving what Harris called his "first big day." For the month, the show played 22 days and averaged \$369 [\$7416] per day.

Harris's initiation to the circus business came fast. On June 4 at L'Anse, Michigan, a show horse kicked and killed a boy who had been working for a circus ticket. That night the show loaded on the steamer *Ivanhoe* and sailed to Houghton, Rockland and Ontonagon. Then on June 13 the circus was stowed aboard the steamer *Manistee* for a trip to Duluth. Two days there grossed \$808 and \$346. Great Lakes boat traveling was another trademark of Castello's routing, for he and W. C. Coup had exhibited around the lakes in 1870.



The *Reindeer*, the steamer that transported the Nickel Plate from 1887 until mid-season 1890.

The next move was bolder. On the night of June 15 the show was loaded on the train again and started on its way toward Bismarck in the Dakota Territory (North and South Dakota became states in 1889) on the Northern Pacific Railroad. The 500 mile jump was completed in time for playing Bismarck on June 18 and 19, where the income was \$608 and \$272 respectively.

That big jump was caused by some slick maneuvering by W. W. Cole who earlier in the year had cut a deal with the Northern Pacific Railroad in which the line agreed not to land any

circus on its tracks east of the Missouri River before the Cole show hit the territory in July. The Castello show unloaded in Mandan, on the west bank of the Missouri and was ferried across to Bismarck which was situated on the eastern shore.

Apparently most of the town caught the first day's shows. At Bismarck, big show adult tickets sold for \$1.00 [\$20], twice the usual admission back in civilization, remaining at that level for the remainder of the season. Increased prices were typical of circuses venturing into the West. In most cases the Castello Circus was the first to play through the Dakota and Montana Territories.

On June 28, at Bozeman, Montana Territory (Montana also became a state in 1889), the show took in more than \$1000 for the first time; the

total score was \$1286. The second day at the same spot drew only \$296. Townsend, Montana Territory, then consisted only of 30 canvas houses, but the troupe took in \$696.75 on June 30.

July was a notable and rugged month. The Nickel Plate was in Helena, Montana Territory, July 2-4 to "enormous" business. The town had known the circus was coming ever since Castello informed *The Helena Independent* of his intention to play that city and others along the Northern Pacific line back on November 29, 1882. Excitement was high. On June 19, 1883 the *Independent* exclaimed: "At last a circus is coming to Montana and Helena....

Dan Castello has figured prominently in the United States as a circus manager for so long that it is hardly necessary to say that this show is away up. He is in fact the pioneer showman and his circus was the first one over the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific as well as many others of the big railroads of the country.... [It gives] people along the Montana Short Line their first glimpse of a ring performance. One thing may be relied upon. When Castello's circus strikes Helena it will break the town up."

Eight days later, the paper warned its readers that in the East circuses were followed by "a band of pick-pockets, till tappers and hard cases," and implored store owners to lock their back doors and safes while out watching the parade. If there were incidents involving camp followers, they didn't make it into the papers. The show took part in a Fourth of July parade marking the completion of the North Pacific Railroad to Helena. The daily grosses were \$915 [\$18,389], \$947 [\$19,032], and \$1119 [\$22,489] on the 4th

Then Harris and Castello hired a "freighter," an operator of heavy freight wagons, to take the company overland. July 5 was spent on the road; the 6th was good for \$744 at Deer Lodge. Changing now to the Utah Northern Narrow Gauge Railway, the circus reached Butte City, Montana Territory on July 7 where it played to the best day's business of the season, a \$1391.20 take. The second day brought in an additional \$530; and the third, \$260.

The troupe returned to Deer Lodge where Harris said that he "re-engaged freighters to take me over the Rocky Mountains, each train [string of wagons] having from 12 to 20 horses on it. It was something new to me to see one wagon trailed behind another, but that's the way they did it then in crossing the Rocky Mountains." The first night out on freighter wagons, the show stopped at Pioneer, an abandoned mining camp, where it was asked to perform, but Harris demurred. But on July 12, the show was at New Chicago, Montana Territory, grossing \$345.50. After two more travel days caused by rough roads, the outfit

reached Missoula where it rested another day, playing there on July 16 where it won \$1048.40. At that point the showmen gave up the freighter wagon moves and resumed rail travel. It isn't clear what the show did with its own wagons during the freighter moves, nor is it clear whether the show owned its own teams.



Artist's depiction of the legendary Nickel Plate combination bandwagon and cage.

July 18 found the Nickel Plate at Spokane Falls, Washington Territory, where it grossed \$675. Walla Walla was a two-day stand with a \$75 license fee. The first day brought \$1146 [\$23,031] worth of good business, and the second was better than average at \$573. The City of the Dalles, Oregon was another two-day stop that returned \$518 and \$157. There the canvas men "formed a league and struck for higher wages," but they were glad to return to work when they saw others taking their places.

Portland saw the Nickel Plate for three days in late July. July 27 was good with \$730. The next day saw such a turnout that the street was blocked by the crowd trying to reach the ticket windows and show. One performance pulled a straw house and the day brought \$1299.75. They laid off a day and then duplicated the street-blocking routine on July 30 when the show got \$830. Twenty show days in the month grossed \$14,774.50, a daily average of \$736. This was big business for the circumstances.

August brought more action for Harris and Castello with their Nickel

Plate Show. They played New Tacoma, Washington Territory, \$465; Olympia, \$609; and Seattle, \$539; then edged into British Columbia to play Victoria, \$785 and \$608; Nanaimo, \$94; and New Westminster, \$628. At Victoria, the governor-general attended, along with a party of British naval officers. A church was next door to the show and the

priest complained against the circus using land that the church owned. It developed that the church leased the land for grazing to another man and this man had leased it to the show. "I concluded," Harris said, "the easiest way was the best way," and gave \$20 to the

church.

The circus took the steamer *Princess Louise* from Seattle to Vancouver Island to play Victoria and Nanaimo. It went by boat on to New Westminster and then again sailed, this time to Fort Townsend, Washington Territory. Business dropped in the second half of August as the show worked its way south through Washington Territory and Oregon. Among the stands were Port Gamble, \$326; Astoria, \$540; Vancouver, Washington Territory, \$377; and both East Portland, \$313, and Hillsboro, \$298 where the show doubled back over its earlier route through Portland. Corvallis, Albany and Salem were fair. Eugene City grossed \$709.

Then came Roseburg, Oregon on August 27. The town was the end of the Oregon and California Railroad; Harris's agent had again contracted for freighters with the intention of crossing the Scott and "Cisque" (Siskiyou) Mountains to California by wagon.

But the teamsters balked. They told Harris they could not haul the circus over the mountains at the price agreed upon. That scale called for \$5 a day per two-horse team and \$7.50 per four-horse team. Harris cited the written contract to them, but they figured that the showman

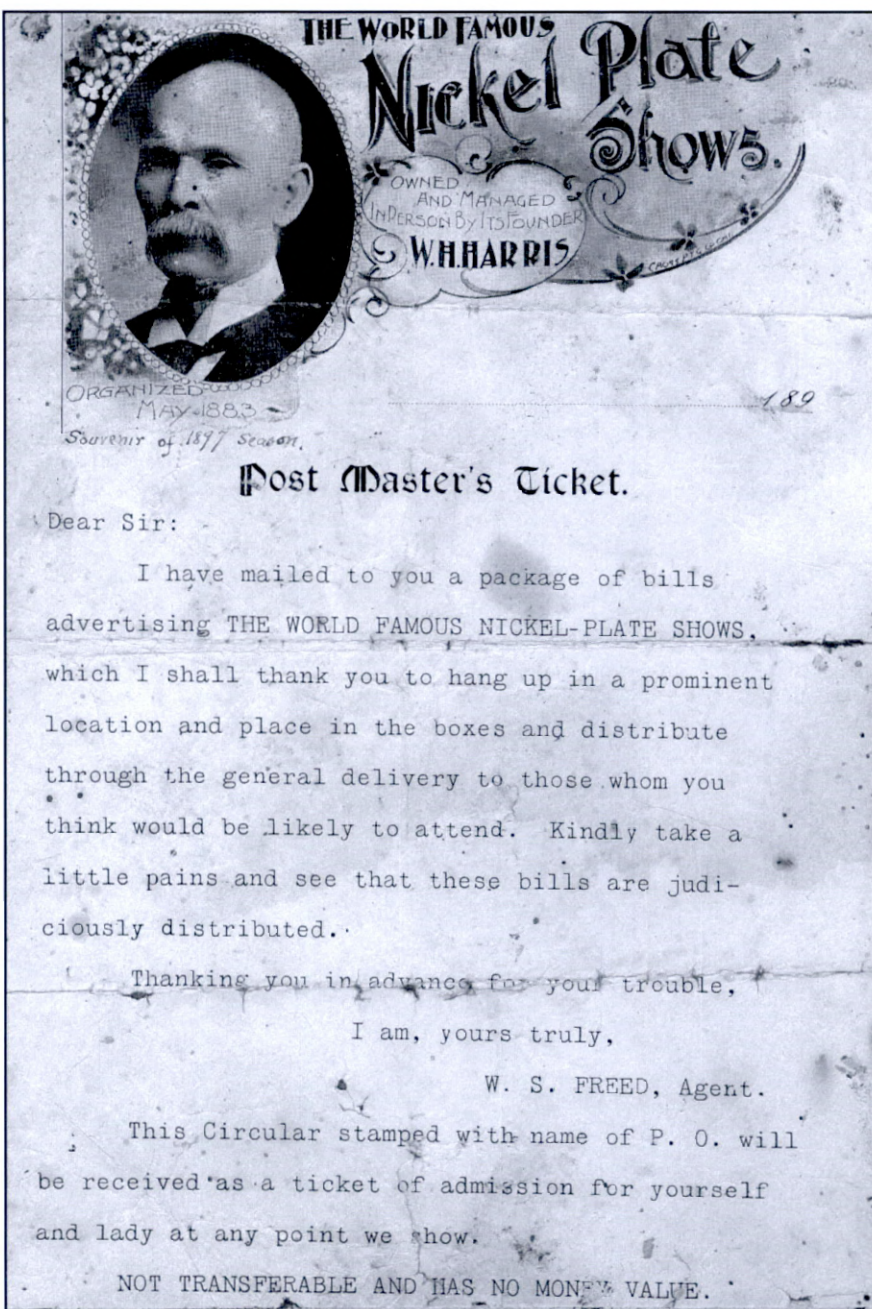
had no choice but to pay a higher price in order to keep to his schedule and paper. Advertising for the circus was running twelve days ahead, so the show's advance was already in California. But rather than meet the higher prices, Harris simply closed the show, cancelled the upcoming dates, paid his people, and put the circus equipment in a warehouse. The show's horses were taken to a ranch for the winter. The *Helena Independent* was coy about the closing: "The season was a very successful one and the breaking up of the company was the result of no financial difficulties."

The Northern Pacific now was completed all the way west. In keeping in the practice of the time, Harris sought an exclusive contract with the railroad. He went to Portland in November 1883 and negotiated 26 stands along the road in 1884 for \$6500 [\$130,632], with the Northern Pacific agreeing to allow no other circus on the line.

Harris then went home to Chicago where he reflected on his first year in the circus business. He concluded he had done well, grossing \$45,302 [\$910,447], an average of \$514 [\$10,330] for his 88 playing days. And he had the exclusive contract with the Northern Pacific for 1884.

From Leithy and Acker, Harris bought "a den of performing lions including Bob and Prince, also the trick elephant Gypsy and a large lot of other show property." This probably was when the show acquired the well-known bandwagon that had a cage for lions in the body, a band on top and a team of camels to pull it. Drawings, probably fanciful, of this wagon exist, but no photograph is known to historians or collectors. While there is no evidence that this was the time Harris acquired the wagon, it is likely it was; and he did get a trained cat act. While the *New York Clipper* said it was a lion act, Harris himself said it had lions and tigers. Gypsy was advertised as an "umbrella-eared elephant," suggesting she was an African rather than an Asian bull.

The animals all came to Harris's barn at 223 South Robey, Chicago, where Professor Rourke, the trainer, worked the cat act for winter quar-



Post Master's Ticket used by the Harris show in 1897.

ters crowds. One Sunday morning a lion escaped, scattering the crowd and killing a pony. Using long poles, the men succeeded in chloroforming the cat and recaging it.

In February 1884, Harris went to the Northern Pacific to transport his three carloads of new stuff westward to join the rest of his show in Oregon. His visit to the railroad office was a surprise to the line for it also had given an exclusive contract to the W. W. Cole Circus. Investiga-

tion revealed that Harris had the earlier contract but the railroad agents in the west had failed to report it to the main office.

Both circuses were willing to compromise, but each wanted exclusive rights to play Helena and Walla Walla. After negotiations it was resolved that the Northern Pacific would move Harris's three new cars of plunder to the West and then his total of ten cars from Portland back to Duluth for \$3000 [\$61,984], payable in advance, which was less than half his original deal with the railroad. In return, he gave up exclu-

sive rights to Helena and Walla Walla. This gave Harris a bargain price and got the railroad off the hook; everyone was pleased. So on March 28, 1884, the newly-titled Harris Nickel Plate Shows loaded three cars at Chicago and headed west as part of a larger NP consist.

In the Chicago yards, a yellow Harris flat, number 13, jumped the tracks. It did it again at Milwaukee. At St. Paul, where the NP began, Harris picked up his private car, the *Pontiac*, where it had been stored for the winter. At Billings, Montana Territory, the elephant got sick after swallowing a pot of green paint so the show cars were sidetracked for two days while she was treated. Picking up the trip again, the show cars got to the Hood River Trestle near Portland where flat 13 jumped again. It ripped up track on the trestle, but the train stopped quickly and a major disaster was averted. Finally learning his lesson, Harris left flat 13 behind for repairs.

Arriving at the Roseburg quarters, Harris prepared for the opening. His performer payroll included: the Three Belmonts, bareback riders, at \$90 weekly; Three Irwins, \$60; Two Josephs, \$40; Two Heelyes, \$40; Dora, the tattooed Fiji Islander, \$25; James Griffin, \$25; George Scott, \$15; George Charest, \$35; Frank Elliott, \$3; Jerry and Leo Hart, \$25; Mons. Niblo, \$10; Dan White, \$7; Cillorosso, \$20; W. O. Dell, \$25; Billy Morgan, \$25; Ada Stickney, \$29; Stableton, \$25; and the Four Quinettes, \$50, for a weekly total of \$538 [\$11,116] compared to \$366 [\$7356] for the year before.

The staff included Harris as proprietor; J. H. Hanson, general agent; C. H. Brooks, advertising agent; E. R. Richards, treasurer; C. Van Dusen, steward; James Smith, boss canvas man; and C. Belmont, equestrian director. This was Harris's own listing, but later a trade paper listed Dan Castello as equestrian director again, and it appears that he was with it in that capacity. Harris's notes show an added \$120 to the weekly payroll, but he didn't state what this covered; it

may have covered these staff jobs.

The Nickel Plate season opened at Roseburg, Oregon on May 3. The elephant and the lions were big hits as was the riding of Daisy Belmont, then starting her second year as an equestrian. The first day grossed \$1026.80. A few days later Eugene City was an \$1109 day, but it took another twelve days before the show hit \$1000 again and many of the intervening days were recorded around \$300. One of these was on May 17 at Hillsboro where flat car 13 jumped the track again. Mons. Josephs, the strong man, said that all it needed was a new washer on one of its trucks. But Harris didn't stop with that. He changed its number to 9 and covered up the unlucky yellow with a coat of blue, declaring all the while he was not superstitious but nevertheless wanted to take no chances. And the car never jumped again.



Harris and his staff in the early 1890s in front of the ticket wagon. Left to right are Charles C. Wilson, Harris's son-in-law; Ed Faber; W. H. himself; Frank Sparks; Oscar Gould; and Walter Freed.

At Portland the show won tremendous business, although Harris was creative when he wrote that he "sent many thousand dollars home to Chicago." The actual business was \$1387 [\$28,657], \$1016, \$1058, and on a rainy day \$159. In its May 23 review the *Morning Oregonian* praised Daisy Belmont's bareback riding, Monsieur and Madame Josephs's cannon ball act, the Irwin brothers on the horizontal bars and Roman ladders, and the Belmont

family on the trapeze and tumbling.

From there the circus began its route on the Northern Pacific, playing 32 towns back across the Great West. For the month of June, the show grossed \$8975.95 [\$185,454], with the best day being at Wadena, Minnesota, \$644; and the poorest at Glyndon, Dakota Territory, \$100.25. On July 3 and 4 Harris appeared in Duluth, Minnesota. The first day was okay, but on July 4 there was both rain and opposition from the Miles Orton show. The Nickel Plate took in just \$134.

By mid-July the show was barreling through Minnesota for Canada, crossing the border on July 23 at Emerson, Manitoba, which the show people found to be "virtually a city without people." Whole blocks were abandoned, but there were people enough to give the show \$200. Three days at Winnipeg grossed \$1114, \$745 and \$250, with attendance reported as nearly 2000 on opening night. The July 25 *Winnipeg Daily Sun* liked the show: "The circus is small, but it is anything but snide. True the menagerie does not amount to much, but after all very few people pay their money to see the menagerie. What the majority of people want is a good ring performance, and that is what they can see at the Nickel Plate show."

Daisy Belmont was singled out for praise: "She does an act on a rolling ball, goes through a trapeze performance, rides a horse bareback and performs many wonderful feats, and in the concert following sings and dances and makes herself generally useful. Daisy must be a valuable little lady." Lesser accolades went to rider Frank Harris, who took the proprietor's surname; the Irwin brothers on the horizontal bar; bicyclist George Charest; and Charles and Lottie Belmont on the trapeze.

At Regina, Northwest Territory, adult tickets sold for \$2 with reserved seats another 50 cents. Customers included some of the English soldiers stationed there. July 31 at Mooseman was the show's

worst day with only \$96 in revenue in the rain. At Brandon, Manitoba, on August 1 the tent was pitched later than usual as a result of rain and a dispute over the \$75 local license. The local paper estimated the afternoon crowd around 300 and the evening about 100. The ring was so muddy that "no fast riding could be done." At Portage la Prairie the next day, the show appeared inside a hall or opera house rather than under a tent, and from there it ducked back into the Dakota Territory. By August 13 it was back in Chicago to start the show's first string of stands within the city. For four weeks it played Chicago lots to good business and then went into quarters.

The 1885 season started with another conflict over railroads. Harris Nickel Plate's agent planned to work toward Montreal, but he found that the John B. Doris Circus had an exclusive contract with the Grand Trunk Railroad for part of the way Harris wanted to go. No other show could play within 30 days ahead of Doris's dates in June. So Harris changed his routing and arranged to go on the Canadian Pacific on May 4 at St. Thomas, Ontario. To get around Doris and the Grand Trunk contract, Harris started his bill car off on April 16. The ten men under the direction of T. T. Showles got into Canada so early in the season that they billed the snow-covered towns of Penetang, Collingwood, and Grovenhurst in sleighs.

The circus train itself left Chicago on April 30 on the Michigan Central. On board was the same executive staff as in the previous year. Dan Castello was equestrian director, and the lineup of performers reflected a considerable cutback from the 1884 show. Included were the Three Castelllos, no relation to Dan, at \$100 [\$2107] weekly; Ada, \$15 [\$316]; Madame Jeffry, \$15; Gus Less, \$20 [\$421]; Tiny Von Gofree, \$20; C. Harding, \$10; Cellorosco, \$20; Daniel White, \$6; the Four Quinettes, \$50; and Frank Elliott, \$2. As an afterthought apparently, Harris added to his payroll: "Dock, \$15." This was Sam Dock who many years later had his own show. Perhaps Dock didn't join until after the circus

reached Canada.

Action started at the very first Canadian town, Windsor, on May 2. The show featured Mrs. Jesse James and Texas Charley. Who they were is unclear. Mrs. James's act included shooting an apple off Texas Charley's head. At Windsor the lot was wet and a target plate behind Charley sank in the mud so that the musket ball was unstopped. It ripped through the tent and across the street, hitting an unlucky towner in the chest. Perhaps he wasn't so unlucky; he survived.

While Windsor got only \$289, the next stand at St. Thomas on May 4 th took in \$508. Subsequent days included Woodstock on the 5th, \$237; Ayn on the 6th, \$267; Gait on the 7th, \$271; and Milton on the 8th, \$167. There was a heavy snow at Caledonia on the 9th, in spite of which \$214 was taken in.


it now enjoys. Harris recounted that the group, "headed by one Springheel Jack, invaded the lot and began shouting and banging drums, tambourines and cymbals and making a nuisance in front of the ticket wagon."

The mayor was called on for help, but he declined to do anything on his own. The show did get him to say that he would okay the show's protecting itself. So back on the lot the elephant Gypsy was brought up. The bull "charged and dispersed the Salvationists." Despite this victory, the business was bad; it grossed only \$123 compared to \$861 the day before at Penetang.

And that was not the last to be heard from "the Salvationists." The show proceeded through Ontario to good business. May averaged \$329 [\$6933] per day. Early June days were building toward the month's daily average of \$449. At Paisley, Sunday, June 7, the show ran into heat about setting up on the Sabbath for its Monday stand, but it still got \$447.

Then the Salvation Army moved against the show again, this time at Brampton on June 17. "These fanatics invaded my tents and held their meetings in front of my ticket wagon, women and men kneeling on the ground, shouting and singing and beating drums and cymbals." They tried to block the midway, ticket windows and gate in their effort to save their fellow townsfolk from the evils of the Harris Nickel Plate and its circus of sin. Enough others got through the prayerful pickets to give the company a decent day.

The circus rolled along to Norwood on June 18 with \$510 [\$10,747] income; Tweed on the 19th, \$634 [\$13,359]; Perth on the 20th, \$560; Smith Falls on the 22nd, \$585; Arnprior on the 23rd, \$658; and then Pembroke on the 24th with a giant \$929 [\$19,575]. But the good business in Ontario soon gave way to bad

W. H. HARRIS'
Nickel Plate Show!
 —WILL EXHIBIT AT—
BILOXI, ONE DAY ONLY, TUESDAY, FEB. 13.
"GYPSY" THE
 ONLY UMBRELLA EARED ELEPHANT.

 The Best Performing
 Acrobats, Aerialists,
 Trapezeists, Leapers,
 Clowns,
 Lions, Elephants,
 Horses, Ponies, Mules.
See GYPSY!
 The Elephant that done
 \$25,000 worth of damage
 in New Orleans, Dec. 31st,
 1893.
 TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY.
 2 P. M. and 8 P. M.
 Doors open one hour earlier.
Admission, 25 Cents.

Newspaper ad for the Nickel Plate from 1894 at Biloxi, Mississippi.

But it was Orillia that the show folks really remembered. The circus pulled in for a May 19 engagement, and before the afternoon show could commence, a contingent of the Salvation Army appeared. It is apparent that at that time the Salvation Army was regarded in something less than the high esteem

business in the province of Quebec. Harris complained of it as a "country of poor inhabitants." Business was "wretched" except at Quebec City on July 10 where \$510 was taken.

To get there the show had to play to small houses at St. Scholastique on the 4th, \$191; St. Jerome on the 6th, \$247; St. Theresa on the 7th, a pitiful \$51 and St. Lin, Quebec on the 8th, \$89. The show was en route on July 9.

The Maritime Provinces brought better business, however, and July 26 found the show train in the yards at Halifax, Nova Scotia. The mayor ordered the show not to unload because it was Sunday. Then the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals stepped in, ordering the show to unload. Whether the circus inspired the Society to take action isn't known, but the result was the same because the mayor relented and the show set up on Sunday for its Monday and Tuesday stand. This proved to be one of the best in Nickel Plate history to that time. The first day's crowd spent \$1198, and the second day's \$1054.

New Glasgow on August 5 grossed \$598, after which the troupe moved on to Mulgrave Wharf, which was lost because of a heavy storm. In spite of the weather, the show loaded out on a steam ship and undertook the violent voyage to Cape Breton. The ship and circus arrived okay at South Sidney where the streets were nearly impassable with water and mud. But the water stopped neither the circus nor the navy; 600 French sailors were at the show. The day was good for \$561, and was followed by \$546 the next day, August 8, at North Sidney.

Another ocean steamer trip was taken by the show on August 11 when it moved from Pictou to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, for a two day stand that took in \$1021. August 17 had the show back at sea to reach Shediac, New Brunswick.

The Nickel Plate then made both circus and railroad history starting on August 20, 1885. After playing New Castle, New Brunswick, the show rolled out that night for a record railroad run. The Canadian Pacific Railroad issued special

orders to move the circus train at 45 miles an hour and with right-of-way over all other trains on the line. August 21, 22, and 23 were allowed for the run to Mattawa, Ontario, a jump of between 1000 and 2000 miles, depending on the source. The 600-foot long train (apparently made up of ten 60-foot cars) carried 125 people. It made excellent time and arrived at Mattawa with 12 hours to spare. It took in \$427.50 there on the 24th.



While many fighting lions were called Wallace, Harris called his Wallack. It appears his banner was part of the side show bannerline. He was on the show at least in the late 1890s.

Then it was on to North Bay on August 25, \$282 and Biscotasing on the 26th, \$60. The latter town was the end of the Canadian Pacific Railroad at that time. From there for the next 54 miles, the Harris circus

Wallack in his cage



steamed through the wilderness on a new railroad track still in the hands of the contractors. The construction company had 6000 men at work along the tracks. It was wild country with rock cuttings, tunnels and trestle work under way. Two hundred miles of the trip was over newly-laid track that was still without ballast. There were 50 construction trains along the way and they had to be sidetracked in favor of the Nickel Plate.

After a travel day on August 27, the show played Peninsula Harbor (28) and Nipigon (29) before arriving on Sunday the 30th for a two day stand at Port Arthur, Ontario. Arrival of the circus, the first to come across the new railroad line, brought rejoicing in Port Arthur and the newspaper raved about Nickel Plate Harris and his circus. Business was big the first day at \$925. It seems the whole town saw the show because the second day grossed only \$99.

Its marathon leap across Central Canada behind it, the Nickel Plate kept rolling westward in September 1885. The ill-named city of Rat Portage, Ontario (renamed Kenora in 1905) decided after Harris's agent was in town that it should charge circuses a license fee. So they tried to ding the Nickel Plate, but Harris showed it was illegal and didn't pay.

Next was Winnipeg, Manitoba on September 3rd and 4th. Harris had played there a year earlier and this time the city decided it would need more license money, \$300. The show threatened to quit Winnipeg and go across the river to another town, whereupon the city fathers decided it would be okay to pay the \$50 license rate after all for the two days, which took in \$954 and \$445.

Winnipeg's *Manitoba Daily Free Press* of September 4 extolled the performance. The acrobatic turns were "simply startling." Madame Jeffries "was simply marvelous" on the tight rope. "She danced," the reviewer noted, "about on the rope with as much apparent ease as a society belle would on a ballroom floor. Every movement was extremely graceful, and she seemed almost to float in the air. How she manages to accomplish her task without mishap is one of those things no fellow can find out." The Quinettes' trapeze routine was praised as was Senator, the trained horse, and Gypsy the elephant. The clowns Morasco and Lee "kept the audience in a state of exhilaration with their absurdities." Dan Castello was the ringmaster.

Harris was the first circus to play Minneclosa, Manitoba. Fortunately for the show, the city decided too late to charge a license fee, and Harris ducked it. At Portage la Prairie on September 8, another license dispute raged. The city wanted \$100, a new and higher rate. The show settled for \$50 just as the grand entry was coming in the big top.

Returning to the United States the next day at Neche, Dakota Territory, Harris complained that customs men were slow. Although he gave no afternoon shows in Dakota this visit, he did fairly well at the ticket wagon. Ada on September 12 grossed only \$132, but Grafton on the 10th got \$254; Hillsboro, \$238; Grand Forks, \$295; Larimore, \$328; and Mayville, \$555. At Devil's Lake on the 21st, there was a great wind storm, and another one struck on the 25th at Brown's Valley. But the main complaint at Brown's Valley was the water.

Harris said that water from artesian wells had a strong sulphur taste "not even overcome by two lemons to the glass." The newspaper editor tried to convince Harris that this was a good place to invest money in a spa to sell this cure-all water. "I did not invest nor have I ever heard of Brown's Valley becoming a popular resort for invalids," Harris recounted.

The next day his circus did \$767 in St. Paul, Minnesota, the first day of an extended run that closed another

memorable season. The animals and other attractions were rented to the Commodore Davidson Museum, then open but still under construction. Sackett and Wiggins also were building a museum in the town, and it was they who got the business. Davidson paid \$250 a month to Harris through the winter and lost money on his museum.

The season of 1886 was hectic for Harris. He opened on April 12 at St. Paul and moved to Minneapolis on April 19, getting \$1051.50 [\$22,804] in the first stand and \$1051.99 in the second. The show played Faribault, \$141; Red Wing, \$215 [\$4663]; Northfield, \$191; and then did a little better in the next several towns. But rain plagued the show.



Gypsy and Baby Barney on the Harris midway in the late 1890s. Looking on are Charles C. Wilson, right, and W. H. himself in the middle of the three men. Note on bottom right of photo says Barney was born March 29, 1896.

The April 30 stand at Albert Lea, Minnesota was a disaster. First, the circus stiffed the *Freeborn County Standard* for the newspaper ads, causing the paper to attach the show. As a lawyer and sheriff were about to seize one of the performing horses, the circus came up with the money. In another item, the paper declared the camel girl a fraud, "being nothing more than a pleasant-faced young woman whose knees turned backward instead of forward." The paper

said the show was "very good and gave general satisfaction. The menagerie was a very limited affair, and the side show was the thinnest kind of a snide." A female trapeze performer fell about twenty feet when she lost her grip while hanging by her teeth. She was knocked out and "carried from the ring apparently seriously injured." Thus ended April.

"By May it was still rain, rain, rain, the showman's enemy," Harris wrote. At Des Moines, Iowa, the sun was out and the show got \$791 [\$17,154]. But at Atlantic there was rain, and more at Council Bluffs. At Omaha, Nebraska on May 7, it poured. Harris complained of the "enormous losses so far this tour," and an Omaha friend urged him to open a "carriage

repository" there. The circus was routed into Nebraska and Colorado, but Harris told his friend he would shut down the show and return to Omaha if conditions did not improve.

The next day at Fremont, Nebraska, grossed \$163 and Harris got a telegram from his agent saying that a strike of switchmen had halted the show's bill car at Cheyenne, Wyoming. While the circus was in Columbus, Nebraska on May 10, where it grossed \$323, Harris was back in Omaha talking with the railroad. He made a deal for the railroad to pay him \$2500 damages because of the strike, return the show train to Omaha and store the cars free until September 1. The Harris Nickel Plate Shows shuttered for the season,

arriving back in Omaha on May 11.

Harris built a 66 x 132 foot building there at Cass and 16th Streets to store his equipment. His elephant and other animals plus railroad cars were rented to the F. J. Taylor Creston Show for \$125 weekly. In addition, his agent opened a small show, using the Harris bill car for it and paying Harris \$50 a week. Then Harris claimed he sold his Omaha building at a \$3500 [\$75,904] profit.

That took care of things until October 7 when the Creston Show folded at Mayfield, Kentucky, owing Harris \$600. A few days later he filed suit against Bingley and Stevens Brothers' Creston Show. Meanwhile, he had taken his stuff from the show to a medicine show. A short time later, however, that deal "sickened" him and he quit the "doctor" at Fulton, Kentucky. Harris's next step was to open a small show "with fair to indifferent people" late in November. But the weather was bad and at Henderson, Tennessee, there was snow so Harris quit, went to Jackson, Tennessee, "waiting to get railway rates to Chicago, getting there December 8. The season had been a disastrous one." No wonder the *New York Clipper* of December 25, 1886 carried an advertisement in which Harris offered his entire show for sale.

During the winter of 1886-1887 he decided to put out a "popular priced show to play Chicago," and this was the plan he followed. It may have been at this time that Harris turned to the pricing that became synonymous with his show title: 10 and 20 cents. Prior to this time he charged premium prices for his tickets in many places, particularly in new territory, and he would again later. Sometime before then he had jotted down the copy for a new sign he would order. It read: "W. H. Harris' Nickel Plate Shows, Admission 25 Cents, the first great show to reduce prices."

In any case, he got new financing in Chicago and in April 1887 he began to play around the city. His first stand was nine days at Kinzie and Western Avenue. Daily grosses were smaller than most of those in previous years, but presumably so was the nut. At from \$85 to \$150 a

day, Harris got \$1074.40 [\$23,156] under the new economics at that first lot. Later he claimed this was net profit, pointing up the great success of his new price structure and route, but his original financial records seem to indicate that this and other dollar figures quoted throughout this article were gross income.

The show settled down to a schedule of one-week stands, playing Ashland at 12th Street, Blue Island at 22nd, Bonfield and Lyman, 28th and Wentworth, 39th and Wabash, and 52nd and Wentworth, each grossing from \$850 [\$18,319] to \$1300 [\$28,008] on the week. Thus, the show was taking about the same amount in a week that it formerly did on a good day.



The Nickel Plate on the lot, date unknown. Note small side show on right.

The 1887 performance featured the hurdle riding of Dave Castello and his brothers, who got \$90 [\$1940] weekly. Also on the bill and payroll were F. H. Sparks and wife, \$15; John Nelson and wife, \$25; Madame Jeffries, \$15; John Quigley, \$30; John Conkley, \$10 [\$216]; Brantford, \$10; J. W. Kelly, \$25; Emerson, \$10; Gus Less, \$20 [\$431]; Chasellarosco, \$20; Charley Hollis, \$10; John Connors, \$10; and Fred Hall, \$10, for a total of \$325 [\$7004] weekly.

Windy City stands continued at Englewood, Root and Wallace, State and 22nd, Wright and Halstead, Van Buren, 13 th and Oakley (where hot weather held business to \$463 for the week), Lincoln and Chicago Avenue, Milwaukee Avenue and Perry, California Avenue and railroad tracks, Halstead and Blackhawk, Ashland and Wabash, and Milwaukee and Morgan. August 20 ended the 17 week tour of Chicago, and Harris figured he averaged \$922 a

week. While he said at one time this was the average profit, there is reason to think it represented the total receipts without expenses being deducted.

Then it went on the road. A 500-mile jump took the Nickel Plate to New Albany, Indiana for August 22-24. This was the seventh show to play the town, but it drew 3685 people and turned another 2000 away, Harris claimed. His records show he grossed \$808.75 on the three days, although he circumscribed this amount up to \$3000 in a later account. The second day in New Albany was the largest of the season with \$312, but still sharply below the \$1500 days of past years.

At New Albany, the circus paid \$20

for a state license, \$10 to the city, and \$20 for the lot. Next was Jeffersonville, Indiana, with a \$10 license, \$10 lot and \$15 fee for the state and county. In three days there the show took in \$584, and the newspaper wrote about "Harris and his lop-eared elephant."

In Louisville, Kentucky for a week, the circus had opposition from Doctor Oliver's Medicine Show which was a block away from Harris's lot at Sixth and Kentucky. At Louisville Harris embarked on another innovation, a river boat suitable for carrying his circus. He had had an agent scouting the Mississippi River towns of Rock Island, Illinois and Clinton, Iowa, during the summer, but without success. The steamer *Reindeer* was purchased in Louisville and Harris sunk another \$1200 in it to get it into usable condition.

When the new steamboat came into view, the show people marveled and thought it was wonderful. Young Clara (nicknamed Callie) Harris saw it as a welcome change from the crowded, hot show train. In her eyes

the steamer *Reindeer* was a "gorgeous" thing. No matter if they found they had to prop it up at night. She saw no concern that the show people had to wear life preservers while aboard. But later she was to realize that this boat trouping, too, was tough. And she hated boat circusing as much as the railroad show. This little girl, who was the envy of countless kids who saw her perform, always wished that she could stay at home and go to school like other children.

"I am superstitious on only two subjects," Harris was to write. "One is that of having anything to do with a cripple or an unlucky person." So he contracted a hunchbacked riverboat captain to pilot the *Reindeer* for four months. The first riverboat stand was Brandenburg, Kentucky, September 5, and the first week of river dates grossed \$926. But Harris had taken a dislike and distrust to his new captain, and this came to a climax a few days later. Harris Nickel Plate played Owensboro, Kentucky, September 14-17 for \$1040 [\$22,414] and then headed for Evansville, Indiana. The Ohio River was low and the steamer drew 27 inches, so as a precaution the animals were taken overland from Owensboro to Evansville. Even with the lightened load, the steamer with the hunchback captain ran aground near the dam at French Island Shoals. This was on Sunday, September 18. Harris's first reaction was to start his performers overland to Evansville, and he sent the captain with them.

The performers and animals got the show opened in Evansville. The versatile Clara Harris took charge in Evansville. With personnel but little equipment she managed to give a show on Monday the 19th. It was hardly worth the effort as the date got only \$34.10. Meanwhile Harris and a navigator, who had been hired earlier by the captain, stayed with the *Reindeer*. On Tuesday the 20th the snag boat *Woodruff* pulled the *Reindeer* loose, and it chugged on to Evansville where business picked up enough to gross \$415 on the six days.

In keeping with river etiquette, the differences between Harris and his hunchbacked captain were arbitrated. The arbitrators, Captain T. T.

Oatman and Captain Whartman, decided that Harris should pay the captain \$75 and that their contract was terminated. Harris induced Captain Oatman to take the show's boat on to Paducah, Kentucky and Cairo, Illinois where the *Reindeer* was laid up for the winter while the circus was sent back to Chicago by rail. In 24 weeks the circus had grossed \$22,392 [\$482,599].



The side show talker turns an attentive tip on the Nickel Plate, date unknown.

The show's African elephant Gypsy died in late March, 1888 at the Chicago winter quarters. The March 20 *Chicago Daily Tribune* carried Harris's maudlin and bizarre account of her death: She died of a broken heart caused by the death of a beloved elk the previous week. The only other thing she cared about besides the elk was a barrel organ on which she played Home, Sweet Home in her act. Her keepers gave her the organ in hopes of cheering her up. Then it got weird. When asked if the instrument helped improve her spirits, Harris responded: "Considerably. She played it incessantly. She played it with a pathos that had never been given to it before. She would sometimes pause in the middle of the tune, as though reflecting on some sad memory which it recalled, and would then resume operations and finish it in a hurry. . . . We found her in the morning feebly trying to turn the crank. One by one she forced the notes from the organ. 'No-place-like-home.' And the girth slipped from beneath her hind-legs. The stupor of death came into her eyes. Poor Gypsy had gone home."

Harris gave the reporter some background on Gypsy. He alleged to

have purchased her for \$3500 from Carl Hagenbeck, the great German wild animal dealer. When first on the Nickel Plate she allowed only Mlle. Dora, the tattooed Fiji Island cannibal, to feed her, later transferring her affection to Mons. Joseph, the French strong man. Likewise, the only riders she permitted were the Heeley brothers. They were contortionists in the performance but sav-

age Zulu warriors atop Gypsy in the parade after blackening their faces, putting rings on their ankles, and donning bearskin robes.

In 1888, the Harris Nickel Plate Circus again played Chicago lots—among them Brown and 20th, Belmont and Baxter, Ashland and Wabansia, Root and Wallace, and Lake and Ashland for about 13 weeks. Then it moved by railroad to Logansport, Indiana for July 23-26; Kokomo, 27-28; Anderson, 30-31; Richmond, August 1-4; Columbus, Indiana, 6-7; Madison, 8-11; New Albany, 13-15; and Jeffersonville, August 16-18. Two weeks at various lots in Louisville came after that.

On September 2, Captain T. T. Clatrinan had the *Reindeer* back in action and the Nickel Plate was back on the river, playing Grand View, Indiana; Mount Vernon, Indiana; Shawneetown, Illinois; Golconda, Illinois; and Metropolis, Illinois. Talk of yellow fever reached the circus at Cairo, Illinois, September 21-22, and in fact the show was quarantined. Harris, however, managed to get it lifted and obtained a permit to leave. At Hickman, Kentucky on September 24 there was quarantine against upstream boats, so Harris's downstream circus boat was okayed to land and show. Despite the townspeople's fear of the fever, the show got \$331.45 [\$7162].

The next day off at New Madrid,

Missouri the show people heard shooting and suspected "a shotgun quarantine." Dave Castello and another performer were sent ashore to scout out the situation. As the *Reindeer* hovered offshore, the showmen sized up the town, and, deciding all was well, went back to the river bank and waved white kerchiefs to signify that things were okay. Then the circus came to life, landed, and went into its acts to win \$265.

This is the original art work for an 1896 Nickel Plate courier. The drawing was done by Emil Roettengartner, a Strobridge Litho artist. The original art work is in the Hertzberg Collection.

Tiptonville, Tennessee on September 26 brought talk not of fever but of a giant cotton crop. One hundred-eighty-nine bales had been brought in to the local gin that day. This prosperity was reflected in Harris Nickel Plate's take of \$503 [\$10,869], the banner day of the season. But there was fever talk again at Gayosa, Tennessee on the 27th. The circus learned there that an all-inclusive quarantine was in effect at Memphis and at Helena, Arkansas. At Osceola, Arkansas on the 29th the show's advance agent came back on the show to report that the quarantines were soon to be lifted. At his urging, the company played Fulton, Tennessee on the first of October, and then laid over there for a week. This allowed time for the quarantine to lift and for the agent to get ahead of the show again to book more towns.

The route resumed on October 8 and included such colorful place names as Pecan Point, Arkansas; Star Landing, Mississippi; Ok Land-ing, Mississippi; and Friars Point, Missouri. Vicksburg, Mississippi from November 5-10 opened with a turn away good for \$398 [\$8600] and then sagged to daily takes of only \$63, \$30 and \$44. Afterwards came

Kellogg's Landing, Hard Times, St. Joe, Rodney, and Waterproof. At Natchez for November 19-20 the show had opposition, although Harris neglected to say from whom. The other circus passed "wait" her-alds to the crowds during the Harris

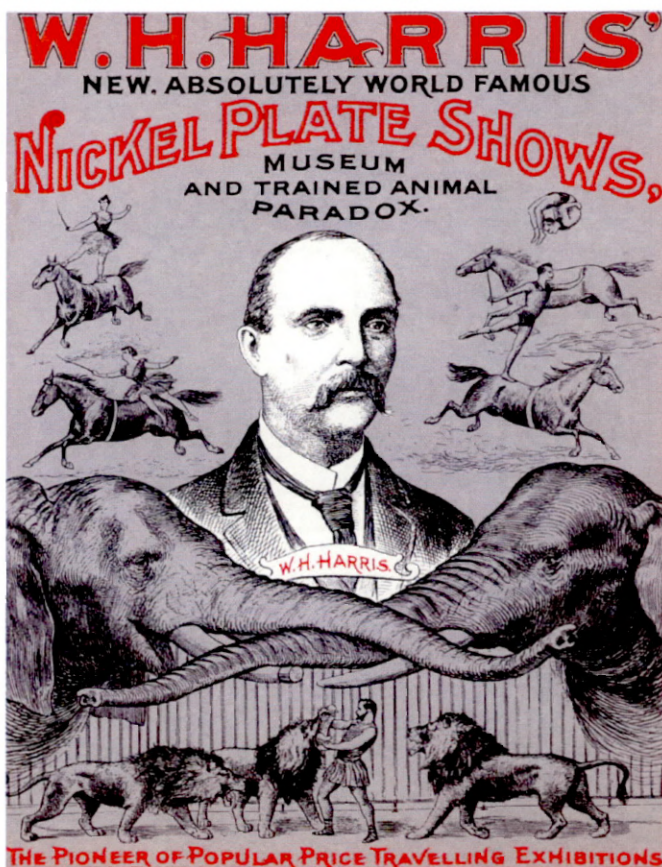
the show grossed only \$495.20 with one day only a meager \$15. Harris later claimed business was big in New Orleans at the outset. On one occasion Dave Castello climbed atop the ticket wagon and shouted, "For God's sake, don't trample the women and children" in the throng.

That must have been the day the show grossed \$171, the best of the run. That was the same day that the city hall called Harris in because the local theater men felt he should pay more license. That second stand was hardly a threat to those theaters. Harris's show bucked Christmas shopping and got only \$15 one day, \$21 another, and \$93 on the best. Then on Christmas day the circus played to a \$74 house and closed for the season.

In 34 weeks the circus got \$31,363.97 [\$677,720], for a weekly average of \$922. In his records, Harris also divided 34 weeks into \$26,000, for an average of \$762, but he fails to state what this represented. Perhaps it was the nut, which would suggest a profit of about \$162 [\$3501] a week. Or it might have been

additional income, perhaps from privileges or concessions, putting weekly income at \$1684. Unfortunately for historians, it could have been any of a score of other things as well. The show tied up the *Reindeer* at New Orleans and went into winter quarters at Audubon Driving Park there.

The kick off of the 1889 tour came on March 23 at Bonnet Carrie, Louisiana with a weak \$31.30 in income. In the ensuing seven weeks the circus played not only large places like Donaldsonville and Baton Rouge, but also Haring's Canal, Labadieville, New River Landing, Dupuyville, Hermitage, Waterloo, New Texas, Smithland, Simsport, Bud Griffin, Red Fish, and Belvue Plantation. These were reached by the *Reindeer* via the Mississippi River, Bayou LaFourche, Red River, Atchafalaya River, Bayou Cort-



parade, but the Nickel Plate's tent was full, at least he claimed so. Actually, he grossed only \$187.35, much less than what he got on other "full" days, so the opposition seems to have had an effect. In any case, rain the second day held the Harris take to only \$45.

Going on to the deep Cajun country of South Louisiana, where many a circus had taken successful refuge from winter, the Harris Nickel Plate floated up and down the bayous to play such locations as Plaquemine, \$14; Bayou Goula, \$116; Donaldsonville, \$283 and \$162; Bonnet Carrie, \$96; and Carrollton from December 6 to 8. December 9 was lost to a heavy storm and the 10th was spent moving into New Orleans.

The Nickel Plate played five days in the Crescent City at Napoleon and Magazine Street for \$692.50, then nine days at another location where

ableau, Bayou de Glase, Grand Lake and Bayou Teche.

The Harris layout involved a one-ring big top. One recollection is that the single center pole was placed at the center of the ring, though it is believed that such an arrangement would be unusual at the time Harris toured.

The Nickel Plate Shows had the side show and menagerie under a single tent. There probably were about seven cages of animals. The side show acts part of the time included Callie Harris working a trained canary act and she also appeared in an illusion box. This was in addition to her principal riding and manege acts in the big show. Sometimes she waited tables in the galley of the steamboat show.

By May 11-12 at Franklin, Louisiana, Harris had completed the bayou route booked by agent A. H. Westfall. He then contracted with Captain George Clark of the St. Louis and Mississippi Valley Transportation Company for "direct towage of my steamer and barges north 1400 miles without a stop, from Franklin to East St. Louis, Ill." Thus, the show did not exhibit from May 12 to June 3, except for some performances given May 18, perhaps at New Orleans, at which the circus got all of \$47.

The *Reindeer* took over on its own again at East St. Louis, and floated the Nickel Plate north on the Mississippi to the river landings at Hannibal and Louisiana, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; Keokuk, Iowa; Nauvoo, Illinois; Dallas City and Burlington, Iowa, the last a four day stand with the first day lost to rain and July 4 grossing only \$164. Later the show got \$842 for a week in Davenport, Iowa. A few days later at Bellieu Belleue, Iowa, the *Reindeer* had to turn around because the river was too low farther north. It played downstream to Cairo, Illinois, then went up the Ohio to Owensboro, Kentucky where visits were exchanged with personnel with French's New Sensation Showboat. Despite this day and date opposition, Harris grossed \$217 and \$240 for the September 6-7 stand.

That fall the Nickel Plated floated back down the Mississippi to play

locations such as Cottonwood Point, Pecan Point, Star Landing, Malone Landing, Mound Landing, Milliken's Bend, and Duckport. November 5 was lost to rain at Rodney. The next day the show was at Waterproof, Louisiana where it rained more but perhaps because of the name of the town the show was able to perform, grossing \$55 for its trouble. Brula, Louisiana on November 12, however, was lost to rain, as was Bonnet Carrie on the 16th. There was a blow down on November 20, the last of a four day stand, at Carlton, near New Orleans. The final engagement of the season was at Napoleon and Magazine Streets in New Orleans where on November 23 a benefit for St. Stephen's Church raised \$113. The season ended the next day.

COMING TO
HAMILTON
W. H. HARRIS' WORLD FAMOUS
NICKLE PLATE SHOW
The Largest Popular Pric Show in the World will Exhibit at
TENTH AND HIGH STREETS,
MONDAY, AUGUST 8



See the Famous Yamamoto Troup of Royal Japanese
See "Gypsy" the largest Elephant in the World and her
little baby "Barney."
Two Performances Daily at 2 and 8 P. M.
DOORS OPEN ONE HOUR EARLIER.

Newspaper ad for Harris for Hamilton, Ohio engagement on August 8, 1898.

For the 32-week season of 1889, all spent on rivers and bayous, the Harris Nickel Plate Shows took in \$27,834.56 [\$619,319], for a daily average of \$211 [\$4695], according to Harris's figuring. That arithmetic is wrong, but perhaps Harris was counting in factors he did not bother to record.

By 1889 the young Harris daughters, Callie and Lillian, were able little bareback riders and Callie was complimented for the progress and

improvement she made in her principal riding. She jumped balloons and banners both forward and backward. But at Waterloo, Iowa she took a tumble and fractured an arm. The little town had no physician, only a veterinarian, and it was he who set the broken arm. It was done improperly, so when the show reached New Orleans that winter, Callie was taken to the hospital where the arm was re-broken and set again. As boat owners the Harris family was entitled to free hospitalization at the Marine Hospital.

The little girls' trainer for bareback riding was none other than Dan Castello, known to them as Uncle Dan. They worked with a riding mechanic and in keeping with the practice of the time they stood upon a pad, or small platform, that was placed upon the horse like a large flat saddle. The training was hard and Uncle Dan was firm. If they made a mistake, he would jerk on the mechanic's rope, hauling the child into the air, and then he snapped their legs with his ringmaster's whip.

Uncle Dan took a nip or more now and again, and it seems he was not alone. Several of the people on the circus were heavy drinkers. Among them was Al Armour, who was harmless as a tipsy clown, but who had been forced to give up his knife-throwing act for obvious reasons. Claude Orton, ringmaster of the show for several seasons, was a "rum head," according to at least one recollection. His oft-repeated answer to nearly any question put to him was, "I did the best I could."

Unbeknownst to Nickel Plate himself, the pie car on his show was nicknamed The Dizzy because some of the refreshments served there were inclined to make one wobbly. Presiding in the car was "the dirtiest cook ever," who wore an apron stiff with grease.

When the circus open for 1890 at New Orleans, the company included the Albin family of three who got \$50 [\$1121] weekly; Ed and Charles Kennard and Harry Brandon, \$45 [\$1009] for all three; Claude Orton, \$18; Frank H. Sparks, \$15; John Beers, \$8; and George LaRosa, \$15, for a total of \$151 [\$3387]. W. H.'s daughters Lillie and Callie were also

in the performance, and the *New York Clipper* mentioned Conklin and Filmore as additional performers, although Harris did not list them on the payroll.

The show was in New Orleans from March 1 through April 13, playing lots at Carlton, Napoleon and Magazine, 3rd and Fulton, Rampart and DeLord, McCarty Square, Algiers, Gretna, Keller's Market and Racket Green. The opening day's records show an income of 90 cents! And a later day got only \$12, but some days brought in more than \$200 and the run was termed a success.

Again aboard the *Reindeer*, Harris Nickel Plate jumped all the way to East St. Louis, taking the second half of April off to make the move, reopening May 1-3 at the Illinois city. Shortly thereafter the show was on the Illinois River, playing Beardstown, \$139 [\$3118]; Havana, \$62; Pekin, \$90 and \$88; Chillicothe, \$88; Lacon, \$97; and six days in Peoria for a total of \$1158 [\$25,973] on the run. The circus had announced a different route along this river, including some of the same towns and many more that were not made.

After Peoria the show left the river. This seems to have been the parting of the circus and the *Reindeer*. The steamer probably just gave out, which offers a clue why the river route was abandoned. And the circus went home to Chicago, playing the familiar group of neighborhood lots from May 26 through September 20.

In June old "Uncle Dan" Castello visited and for several nights he resumed his position in the ring. While the show was working its home territory, Harris contracted for a new building on the rear of his property. This was a four-story brick barn with an additional basement. The upper floors were for storage or equipment and cages. The ground floor was for an arena in which stock was trained. The *Clipper* reported that "Business in Chicago is great." Harris's records reveal that the daily takes ranged from about \$200 to \$80 or \$90, with a few days in the \$40 to \$50 class.

Then, as fall approached, it was back to the rivers for Harris. The

show moved direct to Cairo, Illinois, and while this must have been by rail, it is unknown if the move was made on show cars or on Illinois Central system cars. There is reason to believe Harris had sold off his train much earlier and used system cars for its few rail jumps since buying the old *Reindeer*.



Harris, left, and Wilson in Masonic hats about 1900.

This time there was a different boat waiting at Cairo, the *Maggie Raney*, and it was leased rather than purchased. Ahead of it was an advance brigade of five men. The show floated downstream to Mississippi River towns and landings such as Hickman, Kentucky; Tipstonsville, Tennessee; Oscellola, Arkansas; Friar's Point, Mississippi; and a three-day stand at Vicksburg, ending November 1. Another month took the show through Louisiana rivers and bayous to Red River Landing, Simsport, Platonville, Napoleonville, and Labidville, among others. Five stands in New Orleans ended the season on December 14, and Harris was back in winter quarters in the Crescent City, far from his newly constructed quarters building in Chicago. The Harris family also stayed in New Orleans, as did Frank Sparks, who was breaking a five-pony act and a new six-horse act.

For 1891, the Harris Nickel Plate Shows branched off again into new territory and a new route. Among show executives O. F. Gould was

treasurer; F. E. Davis, railroad contractor; Cooney Bowers, agent; and P. Jenkins, band leader. The performance opened with an entry by ten white horses, a stirring overture by the band, and a song by Charlie Kennard. Little Frank Haines (Harris), "child prodigy," worked a four-pony act. Harry Brandon appeared as the Spanish king. Little Callie Harris rode principal bareback, and Charlie Kennard was back as a clown; the Four Aakes worked a brother act. Al Armour clowned through a January mule routine with Frank Sparks acting as ringmaster. Christian Moerlin worked double trapeze. Claude Orton rode the four-horse act. Ed Kennard did several turns plus clowning. Dave Castello rode a "hurricane" hurdle act. Then Kennard, Brandon and Kennard did a clown bit called the Trunk Mystery. Mrs. W. H. Harris rode Senator, the equine wonder. Fields and Donley worked while dressed as monkeys. Lillie Harris rode Romeo, the dancing horse. Claude Orton worked the old Pete Jenkins act; and James Rourke was trainer of the den of lions and tigers.

The show played nine stands in New Orleans, closing on April 19, and then headed north. After three lost days, the circus appeared at Jackson, Tennessee on April 23-25 where the grosses were \$217 [\$4819], \$305 [\$6773] and \$241 [\$53521]. Harris must have rejoiced at this stand that marked his return to railroad show operation. Of course, the nut was more and many of the days grossed about the same as the riverboat show had done, but now there were many more stands getting \$300 and some such as Ellsberry, Missouri where \$581 was realized on May 11.

A week at St. Louis brought in only \$670 [\$14,878]. Quincy, Illinois gave \$366; and a few days later at Keokuk, Iowa, the first day produced \$361, but the second only got \$39 in a storm. Ford Madison was lost after the circus grossed \$193 and \$301 at Burlington, Iowa. There were a couple of weeks of fair business in Iowa, but at Omaha the show got only \$326 in three days. One of three days in Des Moines was hit by bad weather and the show got only \$15. June 24 found the Harris Nickel Plate back in

Chicago.

This time, the Chicago lots were played for only two days each rather than a week as in the past. Daily takes again ranged from \$40 to \$200. Twelve stands finished off the city and Harris moved on to three weeks in Indiana with a side trip to Ohio.

Rain began to hurt as the show was gully washed at Louisville, dampened at Henderson, Kentucky, and blanked out at Fairfield, Illinois on September 3. Belleville, Illinois on September 6 brought in \$350, however, and then came De Soto, Missouri on the 9th, \$400; Iron Mountain, Missouri on the 12th, \$333; and Poplar Bluff, Missouri on the 14, \$488.

The show doubled back after playing Little Rock to cross the river, playing Memphis for two days. After that came new territory: Alabama. This fertile area had the show in tall cotton. The best week the show had in years was at Huntsville, Alabama, \$371; Gurley's, \$347; Scottsboro, \$266; Stevenson, \$445; and Chattanooga, Tennessee, \$456 and \$434, for a six day total of \$2321. Where the boat show had been getting around \$800 most weeks, the rail show was grossing \$1200, \$1400, and \$1500 for numerous weeks. Even in Mobile, Alabama, with a pair of very cold days and one day of opposition from the King and Franklin Circus, Harris got \$1501 [\$33,330] for the week.

After losing December 3-4 to cold weather, the shows time in New Orleans finally came. Lots were at Engine and Villers, St. Bernard and Roman, and Broad and Ursaline where the show shuttered for the season on December 20. All together it must have been one of the show's most successful seasons.

Present sources don't reveal where Harris acquired his railroad equipment either at the outset or when he returned to trains after the riverboat episode. There were about seven or eight cars, including a diner or pie car, several flats, plus stock and sleepers. A bill car traveled ahead of the show. It was a crowded train, as were all show cars, and on this one even the Harris family did not have much extra space, certainly not a private car. A member of the family

recalls they were lucky to have berths.


W. H. Harris was definitely the boss on the show he owned. He was a stern looking man and one with firm ideas. He smoked a pipe and he never drank. Once when he was nearly broke he spent his last funds for a diamond-studded piece of jewelry because he refused to acknowledge loss or defeat. And sure enough, he made his comeback quickly. He never turned up his coat collar, even

COMING TO WATERLOO

W. H. HARRIS WORLD FAMOUS

Nickle Plate Show

Will Exhibit at Waterloo, Thursday, September 5th.



The Famed St. Leons
Supreme Acrobats & Riders

The Marvelous Merediths
Kings & Queens of the Air

The Wonderful Carrolls on
Slender Swinging Perches.

8 Magnificent Siberian Camels &
Gypsy. The Largest Elephant on Earth.
A \$10,000 Den of Performing African Lions.
The Largest Popular Priced Show in the World

Newspaper ad for the Nickel Plate's date at Waterloo, Iowa on September 5, 1901.

in the coldest winter.

Although married to a forceful woman, Harris was the commander in his family as well as on his show. Once when the circus was loading out and the Harrises were at the cars, W. H. asked, "What's the matter with the wagons. They are not coming through as they ought to." And it was Mrs. Harris who then walked back to the lot to see why the wagons weren't coming on schedule.

The line up for the 1892 circus included the three Millettes, at \$45 [\$989] a week; the two Kennards; Lella Frog; Leo W. La Rosa; Mohring brothers; Albert Castello; Little Frank; and others. Among staff men were J. Sky Clark, ticket seller; and Sailor Jack, boss canvas man.

The year opened in New Orleans on March 5. Cold weather held business to \$20 on March 17, and heavy rain blanked out the show on March

24. On April 10, the circus ended its New Orleans series and figured a daily average gross of \$145 [\$3188] for the effort.

Once again the Harris Nickel Plate Show was routed into fresh territory. It cut across southern Mississippi to play Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian and Biloxi before blowing Scranton on April 14. Business was bad at Mobile, but Selma, and Anniston, Alabama were good and soon after came two days at Chattanooga,

Tennessee that did \$440 and \$368. Knoxville followed with a huge day of \$726 [\$15,962] and one of \$355 [\$7805]. At Marion, Virginia, the show exhibited in the Opera House, probably because of lot difficulties. They probably should have blown the town as the receipts were only \$34.

Strong dates followed at Roanoke, Virginia on May 4, \$456 [\$9366]; Norfolk on the 10th and 11th, \$502 [\$11,037] and \$226; Newport News on the 12th, \$675; Richmond on the 13th and 14th, \$523 and \$386; Charlottesville on the 16th, \$566; and Staunton on the 17th, \$404. A bit later, Hagerstown, Maryland drew a blank because of rain.

For June 13 to 15 the circus was at Binghamton, New York doing weak business, starting with a paltry \$56 the first day. Then it went to Albany, Troy and on into Massachusetts. By July 5 the show had doubled back to play Binghamton again, this time for \$151. July 12 at Rochester was lost. The troupe appeared through New York state to grosses such as \$70 at Batavia, \$57 at Lockport, and \$86 on the second day at Buffalo. Weekly grosses were in the neighborhood of \$1200 in most instances. A discordant note was struck in Wellsville, New York in late July when "a gang of toughs" who were following the show broke into a clothing store. While they were caught in the act, they managed to escape.

So it was not surprising that the agent wheeled the show around to

return to the Virginia territory that was so profitable in the spring. A week in West Virginia and Maryland brought a total of only \$907, including \$175 earned at Hagerstown, Maryland, which had been rained out earlier in the season. At Martinsburg, West Virginia on August 19 the show got in a bad jackpot when a circus employee was fatally wounded for taking a shortcut across property adjoining the circus lot after the owner had strenuously objected. The enraged circus personnel were about to lynch the property owner, one account had the rope around his neck, when W. H. Harris came upon the scene and calmed the troupes down, preventing the hanging. It was reported that Harris showed mercy because both he and the property owner were Masons.

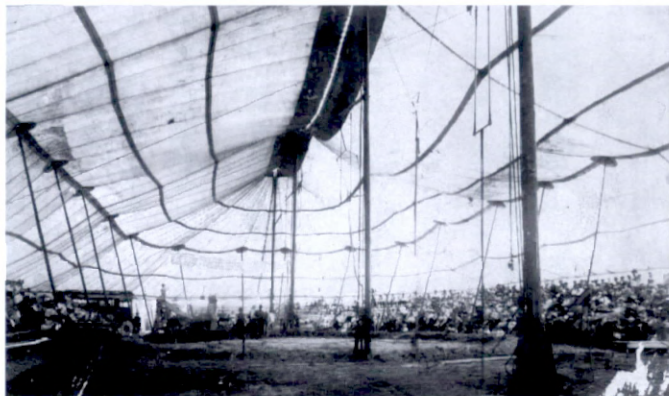
Another repeater was Roanoke, Virginia where it got \$483 compared to \$456 in May. Similarly, Bristol, Virginia did \$432 on September 5 compared to \$452 in May. The week ending the day before Bristol was good for \$2025. Realizing he was on to something, Harris replayed Knoxville on September 12, bringing in \$549, and Chattanooga on the 14th for \$434. From September 25 to October 18 the Nickel Plate was back on its favorite lots in New Orleans. The final two days were benefits for the Broadway and Eagle Rifle clubs.

On the season, the show had played eight weeks in New Orleans, averaging \$1034 [\$22,733] a week against expenses of \$742 [\$16,313], leaving a profit of nearly \$300 [\$6596] weekly. This compared with average weekly income of \$1524 [\$33,506] and expenses of \$1428 [\$31,396] for the 24 weeks spent on the road. While the income was greater outside the Crescent City, so were the expenses, leaving a profit of only about \$100 [\$2199] a week. The New Orleans profit was close to the road profit, but had been earned in a third the time.

The season of 1893 found Harris repeating his new-found practice of playing a town both early and late in

the tour. Among those along for ride were Harry Castello, Albert Orton, and others who had been around the show several years.

The route began at Thibodeaux, Louisiana, February 18-19 and continued through the Cajun country the boat show had played a few years before, towns such as Houma, Morgan City, Franklin, New Iberia, Abbeville, and St. Martinsville. Harris issued a press release which appeared in the February 25 issue of *The Lafayette (Louisiana) Advertiser* in which it was stated that Harris had "no games of chance or swindlers connected with him, nor will he allow them where he is. He claims to be a gentleman and an honest man, and advertises his circus just as it is and misrepresents nothing."



Interior of Harris big top, date unknown.

For March 9-11 it was in Houston, Texas; for the 13-16th, Dallas; and for the 16-18th Fort Worth. After a swing through Northeast Texas, the Harris show was back in New Orleans at Gretna for three days before heading east. It made Mobile, Selma, Anniston, Chattanooga, Knoxville, Bristol, Radford, Roanoke, Norfolk, Newport News and Richmond in April and early May, although it had played these towns the previous year at least once and in many cases, twice. The circus did better in Pennsylvania than in the previous season. At Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on May 22, some of the show's tents were destroyed by fire and several people were seriously injured. More trouble occurred at Pittsburgh on June 6 when the big top caught fire during the performance. A gasoline

lamp exploded, destroying the tent. Many women and children were trampled in the mad rush to exit the pavilion, but no one was seriously hurt. The elephant's ears were singed.

It sped across Ohio and made a week of it in Indiana prior to returning to its old stomping grounds in Chicago. From June 19 through July 30, the show made the Chicago neighborhoods. Next came the Mississippi River Valley towns of Moline, Rock Island, Davenport, Keokuk, Quincy, and Hannibal. Soon the show was in Kansas for five dates and then it went into Indian Territory.

While in Chicago on June 23 the elephant Eulalie (in fact, probably Gypsy) escaped, slightly injuring James O'Rourke, a canvas man who

was filling in for the regular handier, after he struck the bull one too many times to walk faster when the show moved to another location in the Windy City. She tossed O'Rourke to the ground, then stepped on him, breaking two ribs. The enraged pachyderm caused some property damaged before she was brought under control.

September 1 found the Harris company in Dennison, Texas, and on September 5 it played a repeat engagement at Dallas. Fort Worth saw the show on both September 9 and September 18. This was the troupe's second and third shots at Fort Worth, having appeared there three days in mid-March. Subsequent dates were at Denton, September 19; Whitesboro, 20; Sherman, 21; Bonham, 22; Honey Grove, 23; Paris, 25; Clarksville, 26; and Texarkana, 27, exactly the same towns in the same order as it had played March 20-28 the same year.

Houston was played for a second three-day stand from October 9-11, followed by Beaumont, Texas; Orange; Lake Charles, Louisiana; Crowley; Rayne, Lafayette, Opelousas; Washington; St. Martinsville; New Iberia; Abbeville; Franklin; Patterson; Morgan City; Houma; and Thibodeaux. These were the same towns in reverse order in which the circus had appeared during the first

16 days of the season.

After concentrating on Mississippi towns in November along with a lost date at Memphis on the 15th, the Nickel Plate returned to New Orleans for a week of stands on the lots. That ended Harris's year. The season's average gross per week was \$1752 [\$38,495] on the road and \$852 [\$18,720] in Chicago.

Late in the year the show purchased an elephant named Jimmie from the Springfield, Illinois zoo where he was the ride elephant. Previous to that he trouped with the W. W. Cole Circus. Soon after arriving in New Orleans, Jimmie sapped keeper Frank Scott, then ran. The circus men brought Gypsy, the other elephant on the show, in the hope that her presence would calm down the younger bull. She distracted him long enough for the Harris elephant men to bring him under control.

When the Panic of 1893 struck it affected business on the show only slightly, but it had far more serious effects in Chicago. There was a run on the Union Trust Bank, and since Harris had funds there and lost them, he lost control of the circus for a time.

The 1894 season started early. On February 10 the show was in action at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and quickly jumped across the state to Florida, playing spots such as Pensacola, \$398 [\$9080]; Defuniak Springs, \$274 [\$6251]; Marianna; Tallahassee, \$33 [\$753]; Live Oak, \$219; and Jacksonville, \$350 and \$416. At Marianna on February 21 Gypsy the elephant went on a rampage. After being chained down after becoming unruly, he escaped again, tearing down tents, knocking one person down, and coming close to killing several others. His life ended as a result of 20 shots from a Winchester; at least that is what the *Charlotte* (North Carolina) *Observer* stated in its February 22 edition. In fact, this was Jimmie the elephant who had joined the show at the end of 1893. Harris's advertising in early February boomed: "See Gypsy! The Elephant that done \$25,000 worth of damage in New Orleans, Dec. 31, 1893." Jimmie was a tough customer. At Biloxi, Mississippi in mid-February he didn't leave the elephant

car because of his ill humor.

Tampa was another two day stand on March 16 and 17. By April 2 to 4 the show was in Macon, Georgia, grossing \$415, \$456, and \$156. Athens on April 9 was good for \$628 [\$14,328], while Elberton brought in \$465. Soon Harris was in the territory he found so good two years before, the Virginia towns of Suffolk, Norfolk, Newport News, Richmond, and Staunton. Hagerstown was a two-day stand. Pennsylvania dates followed. The circus day and dated a storm in Harrisburg and consequently got only \$27 and \$97. Allenton on

typical; the show usually received rave reviews.

Then the Nickel Plate backtracked through New York, Ohio and Indiana. At Marion, Ohio in late July a member of the train crew badly injured his foot during the unloading. The local paper said his foot would have been torn off had he not been wearing heavy work shoes. That night while loading out a member of the train crew got in a fight over a kitten that came to blows. One unfortunate man was hit on the head with a club and a doctor had to be called. Accidents and fights such as



Letterhead from the Harris show, probably used in 1901.

May 26 was lost, as was Bethlehem on the 28th.

Next came a swing through Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont. The *Bridgeport* (Connecticut) *Evening Post* gave a glowing review: "To many the exhibition was more satisfactory than the large shows, for the audience could watch with ease all that went on and did not get confused by several acts going on at the same time. Many of the acts were superior to those ordinarily seen in lower priced shows.... The old-fashioned clown had an important place and was sometimes witty and funny, qualities not often possessed by clowns. . . . Altogether, the Harris show gives a great deal for the money."

The *Fitchburg* (Massachusetts) *Sentinel* of July 6 wrote that "every patron received more than his money's worth of entertainment. The equestrian acts, trained horses and ponies were good and the gymnastics far above the average, while the clowns and mules kept the audience in good humor." These notices were

these were commonplace on circuses of the period.

Harris's pricing policy was flexible, obviously based on what the traffic would bear. For example, at Marion, Ohio on July 25 the Nickel Plate boomed itself as the "Greatest 25 [\$5.70] Cent Show on Earth." A week later at Logansport, Indiana it was the "Greatest 10 [\$2.28] and 20 [\$4.56] Cent Show on Earth."

After Indiana came Chicago for an August 6 to September 22 run on the usual lots. The year wound down with two weeks in Indiana, one each in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama, followed by four weeks in Mississippi and six in Florida. The season ended with three days in Jacksonville, Florida from December 27 to 29 where cold killed business the last two days. The circus wintered at Maynard Villa, a Jacksonville suburb. Harris figured that his average weekly gross on the road was \$1518.77 [\$34,656], while Chicago brought \$910 [\$20,762] weekly.

The season of 1895 was one of many two-day stands. Among them were Jacksonville, Florida; Columbia, South Carolina; Augusta, Georgia; Charlotte and Raleigh,

North Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; Wilmington, Delaware; and Lancaster, York, Reading, Easton and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. At Norfolk on circus day, May 4, two stores and a home were robbed. While there was no evidence that Harris personnel had anything to do with the burglaries, it was reported: "The Harris Nickel Plate Circus show is here, and the burglars are supposed to be following it."

Business was pretty good until the first week of June in Pennsylvania when the total income was \$939.70. Even worse was the week spent in and around Pittsburgh where the six day gross was \$875. Things picked up at Carnegie on July 4 with a \$521 day. There is no mention in Harris's records about what the show did for July 1-3, but it is fairly certain that it simply laid off. A quick spurt westward got the show out of that territory and into its homeland of Chicago lots.

While some of the grosses in the Windy City were less than they had been on the road, so was the nut and the show prospered. From July 15 to September 28, the Harris Nickel Plate was on a different lot every day or so. For the run, the circus averaged \$988 [\$22,767] weekly.

As in the past, the show dropped rapidly to the South, playing only Kankakee, Champaign, Mattoon, Centralia and Cairo in Illinois. Dates in Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi followed. Various locations in New Orleans were played from November 5 to 10, but rain hurt business on the night of the 8th at Algiers. November 11 was also lost as the railroad delayed getting the show out of New Orleans. The season ended at Jackson, Mississippi and was shipped back to Chicago, having taken in an average of \$1412 [\$32,537] weekly on the road, and a lesser amount in Chicago. For the 40 week tour the average weekly receipts were \$1298 [\$29,910].

More elephant trouble came March 25, 1896 while the show was still in winter quarters in Chicago when Gypsy (what other name could it possibly be?) killed keeper Frank Scott. After killing him Gypsy wandered around outside her building until she was finally subdued and

returned to her pen. Harris offered a bounty to whoever would shoot her, but there were no takers. Later that afternoon the pachyderm charged the doors of her enclosure, breaking out into the street again. Harris stated he bought the elephant in 1893. "it seems as if I had lived a hundred years this afternoon," Harris told a reporter.



The Nickel Plate big top going up.

Remarkably, Gypsy survived and trouped with the show during the 1896 season. In fact, Harris acquired a small elephant named Barney, giving the show two bulls. Harris came up with the macabre idea of publicly electrocuting Gypsy on January 1, 1897 at Tattersall's, the big arena in Chicago, charging a fee to spectators. Harris milked the idea, claiming to have contacted Sing Sing Prison about electrocutions. He said the tallow would be sold to a soap manufacture, and the hide stuffed and carried around the country as Jumbo's had been a decade earlier.

It didn't happen. In mid-December 1896 the Chief of Police refused to authorize the electrocution, fearing that spectators might be in danger. Harris wouldn't give up and tried to move the electrocution to the Chicago Coliseum. This idea was also vetoed. Harris then told the press he had offered Gypsy to the Cuban insurgents, then fighting the guerilla war against the Spanish that became the Spanish-American war in 1898.

From opening day on April 25 through July 18, 1896 the Nickel Plate stayed in Chicago, getting from \$600 to \$800 weekly. The show then took a swing through Illinois, Iowa, Indiana and Michigan before settling in for a series of engagements in the Cleveland area. By September the

show was zigzagging through the southern states again, winding up in Louisiana and Mississippi for most of October and November. The first week in November gave a big \$2261 [\$51,6051], the second \$2104 [\$48,021], the third \$1902 [\$43,411] and the final four days, \$1448 [\$33,049] including \$240 [\$5478] on Christmas day. On the day after

Christmas, Harris closed it down because of the intense cold, canceling the final two weeks of the projected route.

There was an abundance of unusual personalities around the show. One character was Indiana Fatty, the boss canvas man, who was as rough and tough as they came. The side show manager at the turn of the century was Lew Graham who would gain further renown on the Ringling show as announcer and side show manager. Mexican Billy, whose real name was W. D. Ament and who later had a show of his own, once was with Harris. Frank Harris was a child apprentice who performed as a rider, but was not related to the Harris family. Similarly staffer Frank Sparks, who came from Easton, Pennsylvania, was not related to the family that owned the Sparks Circus.

Many times the show was at odds with towners. And often the circus would give only an afternoon show and then load out as fast as possible while locals took potshots at the show and show people. Once when the locals were cutting ropes on the circus tents, Charley Wilson cursed them and they gave chase. He shouted for someone to get the elephant into action for a counter attack. Harris meanwhile had lost his glasses and could not see well, but he nevertheless successfully stayed in the narrow confines of a high railroad trestle as he ran across it to escape

the irate mob.

Appearing with Harris Nickel Plate for the 1897 season were hurdle and bareback rider Albert Orton, Claude Orton, Hi Ki, the acrobatic Three LaRues, the Two Hoddys on trapeze, the Two Floods, George Motz, Billy Minces and Danny Doolin, for whom the weekly pay envelopes totaled \$161 [\$3676], an indication of the show's low nut. The season began on April 24 at the Chicago lots and continued through May 29. On May 12 Wallack the lion ripped up trainer Harry Mozart's face and neck. Wallack got him again in Macon in November.

After Chicago the show made a fast move into its prosperous Virginia territory where grosses promptly climbed above the \$2000 [\$45,670] weekly mark. Pennsylvania was no better than the last time with one week getting \$769. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey and more Virginia stands carried the show through mid-August. A rather concentrated tour of the Southeast took up the end of the tour. On November 10 it had gotten \$402 at Macon, Georgia and it was to Macon that it returned for the 1897 finale. The show played Waycross, Georgia for \$315 on December 20; McIntosh, Georgia for the grand sum of \$21 on the 21st; and \$66 on the 22nd at Johnson, Georgia. After a lay off for Christmas, the company returned to Macon for the last three days of the year, getting \$103, \$93, and \$38. Having thus tapered off the season, the show stayed in Macon for the winter, joining the long list of shows that wintered there. On the season, Harris averaged \$1745 [\$39,847] per week on the road and \$975 [\$22,264] in Chicago.

Old Dan Castello was back on the show for 1898, drawing his usual \$10 [\$226] a week and living out his late years the way he like best. With him on the payroll was the Yamamoto Japanese troupe which got the munificent amount of \$45 weekly or \$15 for each member of the act. T. Cooney had the band and he got \$75 [\$1697] weekly while one musician got \$20 and two others got \$15 each.

It was not a very successful season. Macon was the first stand and the show got \$415 on March 15, 1898,

CANTON--ONE DAY ONLY FRIDAY, JULY 25

Location W. Tuscarawas St.
(SMITH'S FIELD.)

W. H. HARRIS' WORLD-FAMOUS Nickel-Plate Shows



THE LARGEST POPULAR PRICE
SHOW IN THE WORLD.

Performing Lions and Elephants.
Educated Horses and Ponies.
Fearless, Daring Gymnasts.

Ad for Canton, Ohio performance of July 25, 1902. John Polascek collection.

opening day. Three days in Atlanta were terrible because of cold weather. Six days in New Orleans were fairly good but short of the \$200 and \$300 averages of one day stands. The show played through Louisiana and appeared two more days in New Orleans as it crossed into Mississippi in May. A long tour of Kentucky followed. Madisonville, Kentucky was a big \$614, but Central City was cancelled because the show "couldn't fix the license." At Sonoro, Kentucky on June 11 the big top blew down in the afternoon.

The show was back in Virginia in July where the week around Norfolk brought \$2370. At Logansport, Indiana on August 6, the show faced opposition from Pawnee Bill's Wild West, which billed heavily against Harris and advertised a 25 cent

admission. Four days in Cincinnati were bloomers: \$77, \$130, \$40, and \$91. Harris then returned for more of Kentucky, West Virginia and Virginia, really saturating those states. London, Kentucky on September 22 was lost to rain.

Farther south, Harris complained of bad rains, poor crops, and poor prices for cotton. His weekly business was in the neighborhood of \$1200 [\$27,146] to \$1500 [\$33,932]. He called it a season at Jeffersonville, Georgia. The tally showed weekly averages of only \$1698 [\$38,411] on the road and a weak \$742 in New Orleans and Cincinnati. The troupe again wintered in Macon.

The Nickel Plate opened the 1899 tour in Macon. The performer payroll list had 21 people, topped by the Jennier family of six, drawing \$45 weekly. Among their acts was a double trapeze turn. Others included the Roberts, Ferris and Armer trios, two Ortons, Barney Shea, Emma LaTow, Tom Powers with the lion Wallack, and Dan Castello who worked a liberty pony named Harry, and a January mule act. Altogether the actors earned \$187 weekly.

It proved to be a good season. Macon grossed \$531 and the first week got \$2221 [\$49,777]. Four days in Atlanta brought \$834. The second day in Chattanooga was miserable with rain and worth only \$84. A week in Indiana had strong business. Soon after, Dayton, Ohio gave a big \$605. Piqua, Ohio was also good, \$658.

The annual swing through the neighborhoods of Chicago began on May 29, playing an even four weeks of one-day stands, averaging \$1251 weekly. In July the show had a \$3000 [\$67,237] week in Ohio and in late August Harris had a banner day of \$703 at Bay City, Michigan.

Scattered reports of the Nickel Plate carrying grift appeared throughout its history. In early August 1899 confidence men on the show skinned a "surprisingly large number of experienced citizens" out of at least \$200. "They worked the shell game," reported the *Daily Herald* of Delphos, Ohio, on August 11th, "an ancient pastime that has never been known to be beat." One local beefed to the police, and got back the \$2 he lost. The gambler was

fined \$27 [\$605].

The show moved west into Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Indian territory. The regular season ended at Seneca, Missouri. On the way back home for the winter, the Harris troupe stopped for three days in Decatur, Illinois to play the county fair. The Nickel Plate was back in Chicago on October 22. Harris figured he had taken in a weekly average of \$2041 [\$45,743], excluding the Chicago weeks.

Harris accepted the prevailing attitude regarding the nature of elephants. In a letter to the *Chicago Tribune* on January 21, 1900, he wrote: "All elephants are bad. I don't care how gentle they may seem. Some day or other they are bound to lose their temper and kill or injure somebody. The victim almost invariably is the trainer.... I don't know how many men have been killed by my elephant, Gypsy, but I have got it fixed now so it can't hurt anybody. I had the blacksmith make a chain harness for it which weighs 300 pounds and have kept it in the warehouse all winter. For the last year it has acted well, but I wouldn't trust myself within reach of its trunk any time with harness off."

The 1900 tour featured the Five St. Leons, a troupe of acrobats who were paid \$75. [\$1634] weekly for five people. The Six Conklins, contortionists, got \$25, and the Smiths were back for \$20. Others got from \$8 to \$18 weekly, and the payroll totaled \$203 a week for performers.

The opening was in Chicago where the Nickel Plate played only a week. After that the show repeated many of the same towns it had played the previous year. Some of the grosses were sensational by 1900 standards. Piqua, Ohio repeated for \$590 [\$12,856]. Springfield, Ohio grossed \$906 in one day. The second week of May grossed \$3589, including \$821 at Charleston, and \$859 at Montgomery, West Virginia. Covington, Virginia brought \$1014 to the Nickel Plate coffers and that week got \$3527 [\$76,851]. Subsequent good grossing towns included Newport News and Roanoke, Virginia; Bluefield, West Virginia; Ironton and Middletown, Ohio; and Bay City, Michigan. Kankakee, Decatur and Rockford,

Illinois all exceeded \$500 grosses in the next couple of weeks.

Both 1899 and 1900 were very good in Ohio, so it was logical that the Harris agent circled back as soon as possible and this time he booked the show for eleven straight weeks in Ohio. On August 6, the Nickel Plate was in Dayton for the second time that season. The Buckeye state lived up to its earlier reputation for the show.



Poster featuring Gypsy and Barney. Reproduced from a herald.

The grift was working at Findlay, Ohio when the show was there on August 25. The *Findlay Courier* of August 29 gave an excellent description of the shell game: "It will be remembered that the unsuspecting victims of the three shell man were rounded in while they were inside of the sideshow tent of the W. H. Harris circus. The 'con' man had his little kit on a board and as soon as a crowd had collected he began to explain the merits of his game. After he had shifted the pea back and forth under the shells several times, he would ask someone in the interested audience to locate the unsuspecting little object. Providing that no money was bet, there was no trouble in picking out the right one. As soon as a couple of fives had been flashed and the fortunate possessors had expressed their willingness to try the fickle goddess of fortune, the pea would suddenly become very deceptive. In fact it would always disappear and vanish in a most mysterious and discouraging manner. The operation, however, assured his victims

that it certainly would come to light soon and then they could win all their money back, if they would only keep on doubling their bets. This they did much to their sorrow. After they were all 'cleaned' the operator remembered that he had an engagement up town, and, as it was then getting late, he must excuse himself for the time being. Exit three shells pea and the money.

"It took the victims about a half

hour to discover that they had been 'done up' and then they realized that they were 'its.' They betook themselves to police headquarters and there told the pitiful story of how they had been robbed. The police told them that they would put forth

every effort to recover the lost money, and also confidentially advised them to go home to their 'papa's' and stay there forever.

"It was learned that the W. H. Harris combination of thieves, crooks, and grafters would exhibit at Fostoria yesterday, so the mayor, Attorney Franks and one of the victims went over in the afternoon with their eyes peeled. The 'con' man was no other than one of the ticket sellers. The state warrant, which Mayor Watson carried in his pocket, called for the arrest of W. H. Harris, the proprietor of the show. He was absent, but his manager was willing to take all responsibility when the arrest was made." The ticket seller was taken before Mayor Hughes where he paid a \$98.30 [\$2142] fine. The grift continued to flourish as a shell game was reported in the side show in Marion, Ohio a few days later.

The show skidded to a tiny \$17 at Kokomo, Indiana when rain hurt the afternoon performance and cancelled the night show. The troupe wended its way to Paducah, Kentucky for a two-day stand that ended on October 20, closing the sea-



son.

Harris sleepers around 1903.

The 1900 tour was one of the circus's best. When Harris got it all tucked back into winter quarters at Chicago, he tallied up the business. The average weekly income was \$2300 [\$50,115]. The average weekly expenses were \$1800 [\$39,221] for a profit of \$500 [\$10,895] weekly, or about \$13,000 [\$283,261] for the season.

At this time Harris recorded his first mention of other money the show was getting. While the Nickel Plate usually gave a good performance for 10 and 20 cents, it carried grift. Now at the end of the 1900 season, Harris lotted down that he had received \$5318 [\$115,876] for "privileges in the side show" and another \$2000 [\$43,579] for privilege car income. Assuming he meant these figures were for a full season, Harris must have cleared about \$20,300 [\$442,323] on the tour.

That was his last season. On February 2, 1901, the Harris show people took part in an Elks Club Circus at the new Chicago Coliseum. Charles C. Wilson, manager of the Nickel Plate and Harris's son-in-law, was director general of the Elks program. After that the circus was expecting to jump south to Louisiana for the opening of the season, but smallpox was raging and the plan was changed to allow a Chicago opening. Just as that plan was finalized, W. H. Harris died on Sunday, February 10, 1901 of a heart attack. He was 60 years old. Charles Ringling was among those who attended the funeral.

The versatile Mrs. Harris and C. C. Wilson, himself a talented executive, took over additional

duties and together managed the show in the absence of its founder.

Their performers' roster was much the same as in the past. It included the Five St. Leons, the riding Ortons, Otto Weaver, Emma La Tow, the Yamamoto family, George Jennier (at \$7.50 weekly), plus others for a total of 19 actors. The band added nine more names to the payroll.

Clara Harris was the same capable and determined woman who had wielded the cutting tools at the old Harris shirt factory. Later she actually made a big top for the circus and with no more fanfare than if she were pleating material at the haberdashery.

In fact, she did not think it unusual to be painting the show's railroad cars, which is what she was doing the day Charles C. Wilson joined the show. Her future son-in-law was the new contracting agent and came to the winter quarters to get instructions and start work.

The 1901 tour began with one day in Chicago, then stands in Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York. Towns included old favorites such as Piqua and Springfield, Ohio; Roanoke, New-

The Harris mounted band ready for a parade.



port News, and Norfolk, Virginia; and Lancaster and Reading, Pennsylvania. Business was good, usually getting around \$2500 weekly.

The *Times* of Richmond, Virginia reported on May 18 that at Lexington, Virginia a few days before, the shell game in the sideshow carried off about \$800 from the rubes. One man lost \$205. The paper also stated that the "shell-man," as it called the grafter, paid the show \$100 [\$2119] a day or paid for the railroad move for the privilege of running the game. Later in the year at Waterloo, Iowa, the sideshow reimbursed a man who lost \$82 [\$1738] on the shell game after the mayor confronted the grafters. Short changing at the ticket booth was also reported. Even in articles complaining about the games, the newspapers almost invariably noted that the one-ring performance was excellent and the audience received good value for its money.

A second swing through Ohio lasted five weeks before dates in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. The show turned to Kentucky at the end of September. Through Virginia and Georgia in the fall, the Nickel Plate got to Alabama for the second week of December and closed at Birmingham on December 14, although the performances that day were lost.

Mrs. Harris and Wilson wintered the show at the fairgrounds in Birmingham. On the season, the show averaged \$1997 [\$42,322] income and \$1864 [\$39,503] outgo per week. The side show privileges brought in \$6100 [\$129,276], so the circus's profits were about \$10,600 [\$224,643] for the year.

For the 1902 opening at Birmingham, the Harris show played under the auspices of the Elks Club. In the performance were the Seven Ortons, the Three Millettes, the Five Armstrongs, George Jennier, and several others, including Dan Castello whose name had not been listed the season before. The band was cut from nine to seven musicians. The performer weekly payroll was \$303 [\$6248].

Birmingham was a

three-day stand sell out to the Elks for \$900 [\$18,559]. Rain cost the circus a couple of stands in the first week. Then came seven days in April marked by more rain and flooding. From Columbia, Tennessee on April 7, the show was unable to make its billed route because of floods, so it put into Nashville and wildcatted a five-day stand there. It picked up the route again at Franklin, Tennessee on April 24 and then proceeded without incident to its territory in Kentucky, Ohio and Illinois.

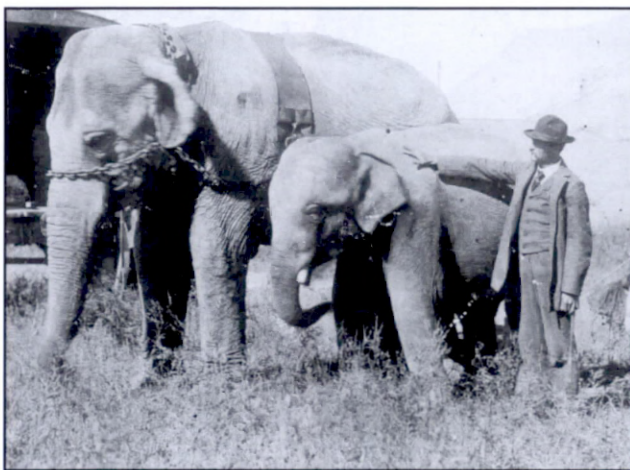
A rate schedule from the Louisville and Nashville Railroad lists the Harris train consist as follows: one sleeper, one dining car, two stock cars, and three platform (flat) cars, a total of seven cars back. The document also listed the cost of the moves in March and April. They ranged from \$125 [\$2578] to move from Columbia, Tennessee to Florence, Alabama to \$50 to move from Bessemer to Ensley, Alabama. Most moves cost \$75 [\$154].

Through the end of May business was only fair. Then came four weeks in Iowa, nine in Ohio, and several other stands, all with somewhat better business. The grift caused trouble in Des Moines, Iowa when the Nickel Plate appeared there on June 4. Gamblers had fixed the town a couple of weeks before the show's appearance. Des Moines was flooded with counterfeit silver dollars, and nine gambling dens had opened. As the *Des Moines Daily News* of June 5 delicately put it: "It is an open secret that the gamblers have been satisfied through some source that the police will not seize their paraphernalia in case of raids and that they expect sufficient warning when the monthly raid is to be made. . . ." Amidst this carnage the article noted that: "The bold operation of a three shell game at the Nickel Plate circus Monday without interference from the police, although several officials were in that vicinity, has also served to encourage the advent of more crooks. No arrests of crooks are reported."

A few days later on June 12 the big top was blown down by a tornado at Sigourney, Iowa. The audience of 2000 people panicked when the wind suddenly came upon them. Down

came the tent, covering the majority of spectators. Many were fearful the wild animals had gotten out of their cages, which was not the case. The show folks were given credit for calming the crowd and preventing further injuries. Nevertheless, twenty-five people were injured, two seriously.

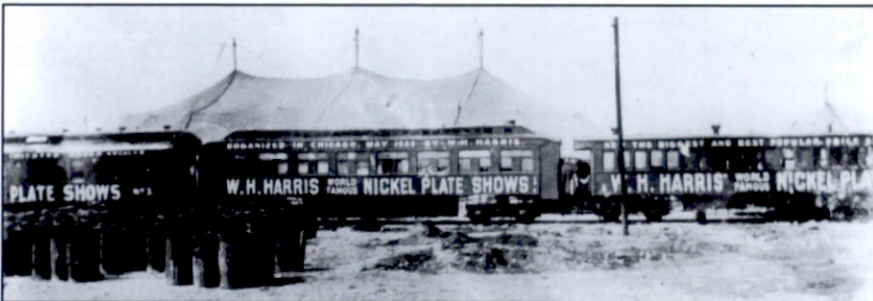
A few more weeks brought the show into the South and to Valdosta, Georgia where it appeared at the Valdosta State Fair from October 29 to November 8 for a flat fee of \$2500 [\$51,5521]. After two more weeks, mostly in Georgia, the show returned to Valdosta, and wintered there.



Gypsy and Barney with Billy Wilson in 1902.

The season's tally showed income of \$66,298 [\$1,367,128] and expense of \$59,994 [\$1,237,133] for a balance of \$6304 [\$129,944], or about a 10% profit. In addition, there was \$3115 [\$64,234] income from the lunch stand and \$3000 [\$61,863] from the side show privilege, bringing the profits up to \$12,419 [\$256,092]. With the value of paper on hand, this

Harris sleepers with three pole big top in background.



total was upped to \$12,919. On a weekly basis, the show averaged \$1894 income, \$1714 expenses, and \$180 profit. The daily expenses or nut amounted to \$285. Beside these figures Mrs. Harris wrote that the "show experienced the worst storms, rains and wrecks in its history."

On November 23 on the train back to quarters in Valdosta, Gypsy the elephant became enraged inside her car, killing her keeper James O'Rourke. She then wrecked the inside of the elephant car. O'Rourke had neglected to shut the door of the elephant car when he entered so, when the train stopped at Valdosta, she broke out of the car. The bull ran into nearby woods where she was killed after taking a dozen bullets.

O'Rourke was taken to the local cemetery by six white horses pulling one of the circus wagons. A large crowd of both circus people and civilians attended the service. All that day, people went out to view the dead elephant. She was eventually buried in a hole dug by a dozen men six miles outside of Valdosta, near where she fell.

The Nickel Plate laid off only a short time at Valdosta, opening there on February 26, 1903 with a gross of \$410 [\$8074]. in the company were the Jenniers, Millettes, Ortons, and others, making a payroll of \$181 [\$3565], plus \$70 [\$1379] a week for a band of eight.

The first half of March was spent in Florida, followed by Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. What went wrong at the Ohio border is not

recorded in the Harris books, but Hamilton, Ohio on April 9 was lost and two more days there brought very little cash. Mrs. Harris noted that it was very cold and that there was no billing.

The same situation prevailed from April 13 to 18 when the show was in Dayton, Ohio, and found no billing but only more cold weather. A good week followed in other Ohio towns, but then more mediocrity set in. Nelsonville was played for two days but the billing mentioned only the second. Seven subsequent weeks were played in Ohio and business was fair. New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois had about a week each as the show turned to Iowa for three weeks. For September the circus was in Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee. By October 17 the Nickel Plate was at Carrollton, Georgia, and at that point the carefully kept daily record comes to an end. Virtually every show day from May 5, 1883 through October 17, 1903 was carefully detailed in Harris's book. Then nothing more was recorded.

The show may have been in decline that season. The *Delphos* (Ohio) *Daily Herald* of May 22, commenting on the previous day's performance, gave the circus an uncharacteristically bad review, "The show was not as good as the previous years it has exhibited here." Further, "The spectators were compelled to seek the shelter of their umbrellas through part of the performance," an indication that the big top was well worn.

In spite of the disappointment in

The grifters posed for this 1904 photograph.



Delphos, other papers gave the show rave reviews. Iowa City's *Iowa State Press* of August 18 opined: "There isn't a so-called 'big show' in the country today that offers a cleaner, stronger or more exciting performance than the Nickel Plate.... It is worth five times the price of admission that's what the small boy calls a 'cinch.'"

Harris Nickel Plate herald used in 1898.

The *Ottumwa* (Iowa) *Daily Courier* of August 26 echoed this sentiment. "The circus is put on at popular prices, but the performances are of a high quality," wrote the paper. "The great saving is made possible by the fact that there is but one ring. This is thought by many to be an advantage as it is possible to see all that is going on without being struck with that 'tired neck' feeling always noticed when one tries to follow the performers in three rings, and watch the clowns besides on the outside of the rings."

But the show went on. No route is known for the second half of October 1903, and the circus may have laid off, but on November 2 it was at Opp, Alabama, and then played Florida, Georgia and Alabama towns until November 26 when it returned to quarters at Valdosta with the intention of reopening in February.

Only brief glimpses of route

are known for 1904. On March 14 the show was at Tampa, Florida, staying in the state until March 24 when it played a three day date at Savannah, Georgia. It then proceeded to the Carolinas and Virginia. In May it was in West Virginia. By August the company was in Kentucky. The *Borbourville*, (Kentucky) *Mountain Advocate* of August 5 detailed the performance. Ed Millette, called Ed Millette in the article, was praised for his single trapeze act in which he stood on his head and drank water. In another turn, he "whirls like a whirligig, standing on his head." Young Ira Millette, five years old, received kudos for his Roman riding. Harry LaSage did backward somersaults on the bounding rope.

Harris was a hit in Kentucky. The *Lancaster* (Kentucky) *Central Record* of August 12 called the Nickel Plate a "good old-fashioned show. Everybody left the tents thoroughly satisfied and delighted with the performances." The Millette family's and Harry LaSage's acts were again acclaimed, as were the Jennier family of tumblers, especially foot juggler George Jennier. Professor Hall's dog act was proclaimed "away above the average." Hezekiah, the January mule, was also applauded.

The Harris Nickel Plate Circus closed at Seebree, Kentucky on August 29, 1904. The *Billboard* said, "The historic Nickel Plate Shows last week passed out of the possession of the Harris family. It was sold to William P. Hall of Lancaster, Mo., the consideration being \$10,000 cash."

And therein lays a mystery.

The William P. Hall papers at the Circus World Museum offer conflicting evidence on the transaction. On September 5, 1904 Charles Wilson and Hall met in Evansville, Indiana where Wilson hand wrote a bill of sale which read: "Received of W. P. Hall (\$5000) [\$95,905] Five thousand dollars in full for 25 horses, 24 ponies and mules, with all harness; 1 advance car with boiler, cook stove, utensils, etc.; 1 dining car with utensils, etc.; two sleepers with bedding etc. safe etc; 3 flat cars loaded with 5 pony rigs, ticket wagon, stake & chain wagon, stringer wagon, property wagon, jack wagon, canvas wagon, pole wagon and contents, also mule wagon & trap. All contents in cellars except personal belongings. Charles C. Wilson, owner."

The next day, September 6, Wilson, now back home in Chicago, wrote a second bill of sale. It read: "Received of W. P. Hall \$10,000 [\$191,810], Ten Thousand Dollars in full for four coaches and contents, 25 horses and harness, 23 ponies and harness, 3 flat cars loaded with 8 wagons and contents and 5 pony rigs, all rigging, bedding, etc. just as used day show closed. Charles C. Wilson, sole owner."

Adding to the confusion was the absence of some equipment and animals in the sale. Hall didn't buy the stock cars that the Harris show had to have, nor did he get any elephants or wild animals.

If it were Wilson who held two such notes, we could conclude that one was drawn for a deal that didn't come off and he simply kept the unused copy as well as a final version. But Hall had these receipts. Were there two sets of books? There were virtually no taxes then, no income tax to induce fraud. Did Hall want to show someone else that he got more or less than in actuality? Perhaps one or the other of the bills of sales was back dated, and Hall used the higher figure to increase the cost of the lease to the Schiller



William P. Hall leased the Harris equipment to the Schiller brothers for their Cook and Barrett Circus in 1905 and 1906. Pictured are George Jennier, Jr., left, and Fillipino Joe.

brothers. This is all speculation, and unless new documentation surfaces, an unlikely proposition, the details of the dispersion of the Harris Nickel Plate Shows will remain a mystery.

While Hall now is remembered as a buyer of circuses and an elephant entrepreneur, in 1904 he was known only as a horse and mule dealer. The Harris show was the first of many circuses he bought. After the sale, the circus train was stored temporarily on the Louisville & Nashville tracks at Evansville, Indiana. Soon after, Hall took it to Lancaster.

The tours since W. H. Harris's death had not been easy for Mrs. Harris and the Wilsons. And there were other complications. Wilson said at the time of the sale that he and Mrs. Wilson would not raise their daughter on a circus, feeling it was not a proper place.

So the family returned to Chicago, bringing from the circus only a pony, a rooster and a pet goat. Wilson had expressed interest for some time in the new film business, and now he bought a nickelodeon at Halsted and Madison Streets in the Windy City. Time proved this was not what he wanted after all and shortly he joined the Ringling Bros. Circus. He served as the Ringling railroad contractor and traffic manager for 16 years

before his death, gaining recognition in that position equal to the reputation he and Harris had built with the Nickel Plate. His wife and their daughter and son remained most of the time in Chicago, but enjoyed excursions to the Ringling show and visited of some weeks with the circus each summer. In Wilson's last years with Ringling he received a salary close to \$20,000, a fantastic sum in the late 1910s.

Mrs. Harris, she of the sewing, first on shirts and then on big tops, would have none of this stay-at-home.

Circus life had suited her and she loved to travel, so her late years were spent in that way. She returned to her old winter home of New Orleans and enjoyed the Mardi Gras again. Six times she went abroad and twice she sailed around the world. She sent home a desk from Jerusalem, visited Japan and England, traveled alone to Africa and wrote about seeing wild elephants there. In India she contracted a stubborn skin disease, *erisipilis*. She spent her last years in blindness, but with bright memories of her travels as a tourist and as a trouper. She became a rabid baseball fan via radio.

For 1905 and 1906, the Harris equipment was leased to the Schiller brothers, who operated it as the Cook & Barrett Circus. Many of the Harris people stayed on under the new name and new management. What happened to the unusual wagon that Harris used as a combination cage and bandwagon is not known; apparently no photograph of it survives.

Wilson advertised in the *Billboard* in 1906, offering the Harris Nickel Plate title and a supply of pictorial paper for sale. And then in 1913 the miscellaneous routes column of the *Billboard* once included the "Great Nickel Plate Shows." This may or may not have been a circus, but in any case it seems to have been the last mention of the Nickel plate title until the 1930s. Then a small outfit approximated the Harris title as Harrington's Nickel Plate Shows.

Norma Davenport Cristiani

Her Image Was Out There —Even on Outhouses

By Lane Talburt

PART THREE

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This is the third in a series on Norma Davenport Cristiani, still active in the circus business at age 77.

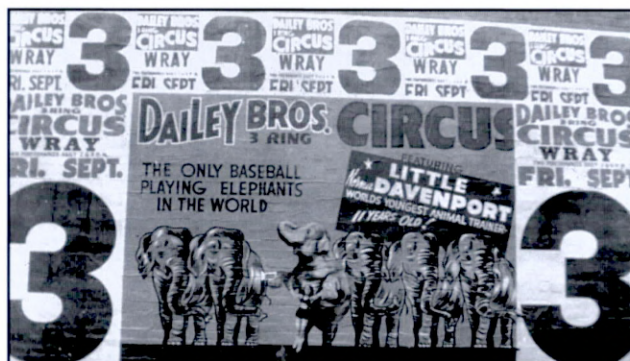
At a time in the 1940s when school-age lads routinely carried lined writing tablets bearing cover photos of glamorous movie stars, Norma Davenport was the heart-throb of many a youthful circus-goer. Homeboys venturing into the backyard of Dailey Bros. Circus clamored to snap her photo and, if they were lucky, to get her autograph.

Billed in 1944 as "the world's youngest elephant trainer at age 13," Norma's image peered out from window posters and 24-sheet splashes wherever the circus set up.

While introducing Norma Davenport Cristiani at the 2007 Sarasota Ring of Fame ceremonies, side show veteran Ward Hall mentioned that Elmer Kaufman, the show's boss bill poster, had teased Norma that her name would be "decorating the sides of outhouses all over the country." "And it did," the ex-Dailey Bros. fire-eater laughed.

In many ways, little Norma's own development on Dailey Bros. symbolized the growth and maturity (or immaturity, as it may have seemed at times) of Benjamin C. and Eva Davenport's enterprise—from a fledgling truck show in 1940 to the nation's second largest rail circus when it folded its canvas for the final time in late 1950.

The rail years were the most exciting and, some say, most rambunctious. This was no "Sunday School" show—"I hate that term," Norma says. The larger the circus grew, from 10 flats, stocks and sleepers in 1944 to 25 in 1948, the greater the



A 1943 bill stand featuring "Little Norma."

need arose for additional performers, elephant and horse grooms, canvas crew, prop hands, cooks and waiters, and last but not least, the omnipresent grifters.

Given a show owner whose fists backed up his rule-making, it's no wonder that Dailey Bros. attracted many workers whose only discipline in circus life was to complete the assigned tasks, day in and day out. Their fondness for demon rum fol-

lowed them into the ring and often sparked brawls. Occasionally, it led to death.

lowed them into the ring and often sparked brawls. Occasionally, it led to death.

"It was a violent outfit," recalled a 75-year-old retired prop hand, Hurley B. Carlisle writing of his Dailey Bros. days on the "Sideshow World" internet site.

Flatcar Follies

Even young Norma eventually would fall into the trap of alcohol abuse endemic to a spirited troupe which endured the rigors and monotony of moving the show and performing twice daily. Ms. Cristiani remembers sharing beers and singing with her pals at trackside or in the pie car while waiting for the circus train pull out in the post-midnight hours. Though she went cold-stone sober in 1971—with counseling and the continuous support of Alcoholics Anonymous—Norma is as forthcoming about her battles with the bottle as she is in disclosing numerous incidents involving her and others on the show.

Ward Hall also contributed a few colorful jackpots for this series. For example, he recalls the enterprising "Flat Sisters," a couple of town women turned showgirls whose nicknames derived from the diversions they proffered to working men sleeping under circus wagons on the open-air cars between jumps.

For every story that would make readers of *Peyton Place* blush, however, there are other equally compelling testimonials to the redemptive nature of Dailey Bros., which gave troubled teens an opportunity to make something of their lives.



Though Ben Davenport was not known as a warm-and-cuddly personality, he is credited by the likes of Ward Hall for having helped launch some three dozen "punk kids" on circus careers. Ben had served hard time for tire theft in his late teens and disliked cops intensely.

And Eva Davenport, the former "Princess Iola" of medicine show repute, could curse with the best of them, says Norma, though she was always at her diplomatic best when dealing with fans and the media.

Despite their raw edges and limited formal education, Ben and Eva Davenport were shrewd money-makers.



Ben and Norma Davenport around 1943.

ers who managed to hang on to a good portion of the cash that flowed into the family car from almost every part of their operations. At the same time they proved to be compassionate cheerleaders of the underdog, whether human or animal.

Being the daughter of the circus's co-owners may have had its privileges, including the family's private car, a private maid and private tutors. But nobody, absolutely nobody, called Norma "lazy," "spoiled brat" or "prima donna." Displaying the work ethic of her parents, she seemed to be everywhere on the lot.

When the holders of a "free pass" approached the tax box at the marquee before each performance, they were likely unaware that the star of the show was collecting the 50-cent fee, 20 cents for "taxes" and 30 cents for service, all which went directly to the show's coffers, of course.

At the sound of the downbeat by Joe Rossi's 15-piece circus band, Norma quickly ducked into the dressing tent in the backyard to don her costume for the opening spec around the big-top hippodrome. She returned frequently through the performers' entrance, with elephants, on the wire and the web, and in whatever latest routine she had mastered.

Changing into street clothes after riding a comedy mule in the wild-west concert, the young teen often worked bulls on the nightly tear-down of the big top.

What a relief it must have been when Norma and the rest of the Dailey Bros. troupe no longer had to endure the early-morning treks of the truck-and-trailer caravan over battered roads to the next lot. No longer would the fleet suffer roll-overs and crashes resulting from bad brakes. And no longer would Ben Davenport have to scrounge junk yards for precious, tread-worn spare tires resulting from the diversion of vital raw materials to winning the war against the Axis powers.

The Davenports claimed the distinction of owning the first circus to convert from truck to rail transportation.

Hitting the Rails in '44

With the help of experienced builder and equestrian director Leo "Tiger Bill" Snyder, Ben Davenport had whipped former semi-trailers into shape as sturdy four-wheel circus wagons that horse-drawn pullover teams would load onto later-day carnival flatcars.

On April 1, 1944, circus hands stepped aboard cramped sleepers when the 10-car Dailey Bros. train pulled out of the Gonzales, Texas, winter quarters for its maiden voyage on ribbons of steel. Leland Antes Jr., in his 1970



Unloading a Dailey Bros. horse car in 1944.

seminal series on Dailey Bros. for *Bandwagon*, pointed out that the residents of the winter quarters town were the only ones along the route didn't witness the grift. The Davenports always played Gonzales as a Sunday School date.

Working men slept in three-high bunks—two to a bunk, while elephant handlers occupied bunks in a compartment at the front of the bull stock car. Horse grooms had it worse in transit, especially on long jumps. Because their pull-down bunks placed them above the horses, they were able to stand on their feet and visit the pie car only when the steam locomotive stopped for water. But after the train reached its next destination and after 10 in the morning, nobody was allowed to return to the train until loading time, as one surprised performer would later find out.

The Davenports occupied a stateroom in the performers' sleeper. Primitive as the accommodations may have seemed to today's kinkers—there was no air conditioning or running water, and a 10-gallon pail at the end of each sleeper served as the donniker-life aboard the train.

The Davenport's private car purchased in August 1944.



definitely was an upgrade to the veteran Dailey Bros. personnel.

The show also made a favorable impression on circus historians and fans who visited the new railer on various lots through the nation's midsection. A. Morton Smith, founder of the Gainesville, Texas, Community Circus, witnessed the set up and performance of the three-ringer on May 3, in Henrietta, Texas, only weeks into the 1944 season. "This year," Smith noted in a *White Tops* account, "the show has a menagerie top attached to the big top and a separate side show, contrasted with last year's sideshow exhibition of the animals.

"Ralph Noble is lot superintendent, and is handling the show in mid-season form, despite labor shortage.

"The steam calliope used two seasons by Parker & Watts, built in a truck, plays a concert on the lot before each performance and is heard for miles.

"The performance is presented in an 80-foot round top with three 40-foot middles.



The Parker & Watts steam calliope on Dailey Bros.

"This year's program has greater variety," Smith wrote, "and is run off with more snap than last year's show.

"About 120 are eating in the cook-house, and there are approximately 140 on the payroll, including the advance."

Bette Leonard, a former president of Circus Historical Society, visited with friends on the show during stops in several Kansas towns. "We arrived [in Dalhart] at 2 a.m. and were fortunate to get a room as Dalhart is a soldier town," Mrs. Leonard reported in *Bandwagon*. "However, we were disappointed to learn they [the circus train consist] were on a slow freight and would not be in before noon. It was 2 o'clock before the Circus came in sight. . . .

"The following Friday . . . we drove to Hutchinson and caught the night performance. All of it was excellent in my opinion," the veteran trouper-circus fan commented. "Highlights were Louie Reed's elephant act presented by Norma Davenport. This little lady is a most versatile performer.

"Mrs. Davenport celebrated her [50th] birthday at Hutchinson and served ice cream and cake to the entire personnel. Mr. Davenport [Ben was 45 at the time] plans to enlarge show by four more cars . . . also to enlarge the top to make it a four-ringer." The rail-car expansion did occur the following season, but the show's growth from three to five rings was delayed until 1948. At yet another Dailey Bros. lot in July 1944 at Manitowoc, Wisconsin, one of many communities impacted by war plants turning out armament and weaponry, circus fan Howard Roscoe was astounded "how much equipment and animals could be squeezed into a 10-car show."

In a 1989 *White Tops* article, Roscoe referred to the roadside bills advertising Norma as the youngest bull trainer, adding that "Norma . . . was gracious enough to pose for us circus-struck young men."

When the circus train later pulled into Roscoe's hometown of Menominee, Wisconsin, the teen-aged fan was able to watch the unloading process. After seven bulls emerged from a stock car, Roscoe and a pal noticed that an eighth elephant remained behind. It was Nemo, the only male performing elephant on the road at that time.

Playing "Poke the Tusker"

The fan's buddy "decided to put a stick through the slats and poke the male tusker," Roscoe wrote. "There was a commotion, and we took off. I'll remember that a long time, as I did getting Norma's autograph."

Actually, Norma points out, the circus train's consist expanded to 15 cars in 1945, because "if you added just one car, the railroad would count it as five. So if you were going to add one, you'd better add five, because you were going to pay for it anyway." One of the cars added that year was the private car of the for-

mer president of the Wichita Falls-Southern railroad. It became the on-the-road home for the Davenport family, who were photographed on many occasions on the rear observation platform.

One of the show's few blown dates during the 1945 season occurred on August 16. Dailey Bros. simply didn't set up that day at Decatur, Illinois, while the nation was preoccupied by celebrating VJ Day, Victory over Japan and the end of the war.

Ben Davenport not only enlarged his own show that year, but also went into partnership with Texas industrialist Harry Hammill to build another 10-car railer, Austin Bros. Circus. Norma vividly remembers Hammill presenting her with a Cushman motor scooter when the circus played at Coleman, Texas, war factory owned by Hammill. R. M. Harvey, the dean of general agents—his circus experience dated back to the old Great Wallace show—routed the Austin and Dailey shows simultaneously. Norma and her three elephants performed for Hammill's new venture on opening day in Austin, Texas, on March 31.

In an elaborate 1962 *Bandwagon* article, Wm. L. Eibirn explained that a combination of rain-outs and troop-train delays caused Austin Bros. to cancel numerous dates. Even the stop-gap insertion of wild animal trainer Terrell Jacobs into the program failed to boost the show's gate receipts. A spell of extremely cold weather forced the hapless circus to end its season early, its train arriving back in Austin on November 11. The hard-luck circus would not go about again. Two elephants purchased for Austin Bros., Jap and Lucy, returned to the Dailey Bros. winter quarters in Gonzales.

On the other hand, Dailey Bros. enjoyed good business in 1945, its second season on rails. The performance continued its patriotic theme, promoting the sale of war bonds and savings stamps. Norma believes Dailey Bros. may have pioneered elephant rides, which were offered gratis to patrons who spent \$18.25 for a \$25-denomination war bond at the performance or in promotions in front of downtown banks.

Business was good enough to allow Ben and Eva in 1946 to enlarge

the circus train to 20 cars and to enhance performances, both under the big top and in the sideshow.

Grifters at Large

To manage the growing sideshow, which fronted for the all-important grift, Ben brought in Milt Robbins, son of Frank Robbins, the legendary circus owner.

"When you had grift on the show, you had to have good acts in the sideshow, too," Norma recalls. "And ours was one of the best sideshows on the road."

The gamblers eventually were assigned to their own separate car—reinforcing the importance of grift to the show's fortunes.

"I remember all the grifters. They liked kids and animals. They always would bring out apples for the elephants." But grifters were not exempt from setting up and tearing down the sideshow top each day.

In April, 1946, Robbins hired Ward Hall just short of his 16th birthday to eat fire and do magic. His initial salary was \$30 a week; he took in another five bucks if the circus played on Sunday. Hall says he began making money from his very first day on the inside stage, pitching a bag of tricks for a quarter. Norma also recalls Ward being paid an extra \$5 a week when he substituted for the regular the sideshow performer who entered a cage wagon several times a day to subdue a "fighting lion."

Kidshow manager Robbins made his opening bally an hour before the matinee, and the ticket windows did not open until the sideshow talker had turned his first tip, says Ward.

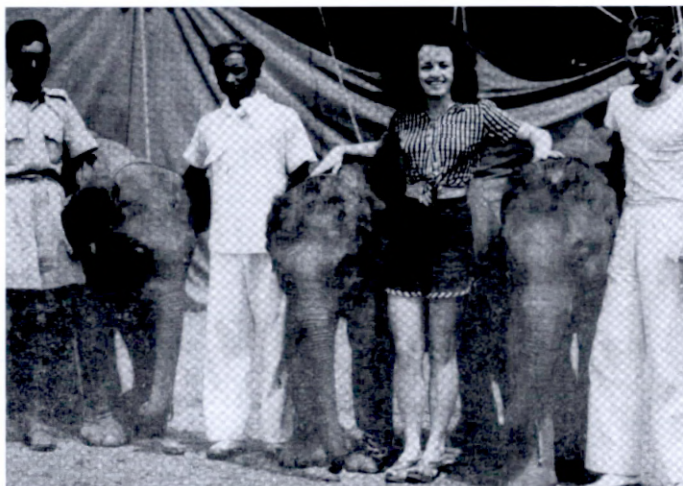
From her tax box at the marquee, Norma was able to listen to Robbins serenading the gathering crowd with "Bye, Bye, Blackbird" over his microphone from the bally platform of the Dailey Bros. Museum. A minstrel band under Johnny B. Williams' direction backed him. (See sidebar story on African Americans on the Dailey show.)

While Norma collected the 50-cent service charge from each holder of a "free pass" to the big show. Her cousin, Rosemary Stock, artfully conducted the "cut in" under the big top. Just before the start of the show, after the initial reserve-seat sales

were completed, Rosemary offered the opportunity for people setting in the "blues," or regular-admission sections at both ends of the tent, to move into the reserves at a discount. For example, Norma explains, Rosemary might switch a family of five to the red seats for \$1.50 (the normal upgrade would cost 50 cents a person). "Rosemary was very good at the cut in," Norma brags.

Aside from the advantage of being closer to the action in the rings, patrons sat on the same soft-pine planks. Throughout its existence Dailey Bros. never offered chairs or starbacks. Customers sitting in the blues frequently complained about not being able to see acts at the opposite end of the rather narrow tent, especially when the show later expanded to five rings. Performers

Cowboy Freddy Fredericks.



Norma and the baby elephants in 1947.

faced the front (opposite the back door), but usually turned to bow to the other side of the reserves, recalls Ms. Cristiani.

Match-Making Haven

The big-top performance featured Norma presenting the Dailey Bros. bulls in the center ring. In the matinee she put the five Weir elephants through their paces; at night she displayed the talents of the three Louis Reed-trained Adele Nelson dancing elephants. For the first time, Dailey Bros. roster included a cage act, 12 African lions presented by Czech-born Capt. Joe Horwath, who married a contortionist on the show, Eva Vasquez. Other crowd pleasers included Mario Ivanoff on horizontal bars and comedy slack wire (he wed wire walker-aerialist Pena Medell); the Reuben Ray family in numerous turns; a 15-girl aerial ballet; and a plethora of equestrian and dog acts, showcasing circus luminaries as Hazel King, Tommie O'Brien, Eddie Murrillo Sr. and Eddie Hendricks.

The Wild West concert starred Freddy Fredericks, five cowboys, four cowgirls and Chief Sugar Brown's tribe of Otoe Indians from Oklahoma.

Norma usually concluded the 20-minute after show with her comedy mule routine. Whenever anyone in the audience heckled her as she attempted to make the stubborn mule get to its feet, a deliberate part of the act, Ms. Cristiani says she would respond by yelling, "I see we have another jackass here today!"

While Norma captured the fans' fancy, her mother handled the bulk of media attention.

Eva: Daughter "Loves Elephants"

When Dailey Bros. set up in Quincy, Illinois, Eva's adopted home town, in late September, 1946, a local newspaper editor interviewed Mrs. Davenport in family car No. 100 "with its gleaming red mahogany interior [that] is Mrs. Davenport's home from April until December. With her on the car are her husband, Ben Davenport, manager of the circus and an expert in show animals; their daughter, Norma Davenport, 15-year-old star of the show, and a maid, Pearl."

Her memory jogged by the 1946 clipping, Norma points out that Pearl Farris later married band leader Joe Rossi, who was divorced from his first wife, Mary. Joe and Mary were the parents of Benny Rossi, who eventually would marry Victoria Cristiani.

The Quincy writer described Mrs. Davenport as "the only woman circus owner in the United States." Eva reflected on "the days of rough sledging" during the depth of the depression.

"We had our backsets (sic)," Eva told the newsmen. "Everybody does. But Ben and I tried to use good, common horse sense. We don't drink. We don't party around. We have never thrown money away like some folks do. When we made money, we put it right back into the circus to buy more animals or new equipment."

Eva also bragged on daughter Norma to the newsmen. "That girl just loves elephants," said Mrs. Davenport, "and I won't go any nearer one than I have to."

Circus life on the rails really brought out the differences in lifestyle between the co-owners, Norma says. Her father, having been raised on a farm, was used to going to bed early, while Eva was decidedly a night person.

"My mother grew up with her parents on vaudeville. They only worked at night," Norma points out. When Dailey Bros. went to the rails, "she'd stay up until two or three o'clock in the morning. Sometimes she'd be up all night, doing the books."

While living in winter quarters, or



Corky Plunkett, bare back rider.

on Sunday lay-offs, Mrs. Davenport liked to go see a movie. "And Daddy didn't particularly care for that kind of stuff."

"When Dailey Bros. was a small show, he was always out there," helping with the tear-down nightly. Once the circus converted to rails, however, Davenport settled into a different routine.

"He'd see how the night show was going; then he'd leave the lot and go to the train. And he'd be up about five or six in the morning.

"I used to ask him, 'Daddy, how can you go to sleep when a storm is coming?' He'd say, 'Norma I learned this a long time ago: You do everything that's imaginable. But if it's going to blow down, what are you

going to do? I mean, you've got the stakes in, you've got the trucks around it, and you've got good help.' So he'd just go to bed."

The Quincy write up also dropped this tidbit of information: "Now Ben owns twelve elephants and hopes soon to import 10 baby elephants from India." The war's end meant that circuses and zoos could resume expeditions to Africa and Asia to bring back various species of wild animals, as well as reptiles.

In the same story, the editor commented on the effects of a wave of polio then sweeping the nation and causing many families to avoid public gatherings. "The circus has run into many towns where it could not show because of the infantile paralysis epidemic."

Bells Chime at "Sweet 16"

Back in winter quarters after an overall successful 1946 season, the Davenports observed Norma's 16th birthday on January 26, 1947.

Shortly afterward, Norma married Merlin "Corky" Plunkett. In the process, Ben and Eva gained not only a son-in-law but an outstanding trampoline artist, actually two, because Norma learned to perform the act with her husband. The duo also formed the nucleus of the Riding Martinis, a new equestrian routine assembled by Ed Martin, a one-time groom for Poodles Hannaford.

In addition to Norma and Corky,

The big riding act that included Norma.



personnel of the Riding Martinis included Rosemary Stock; Larry Carden, later the co-owner of Carden-Johnson Circus; Victor Gaona, father of trapeze artist Tito Gaona; and Eddie Murrillo Sr., whose son became a circus star and promoter in his own right.

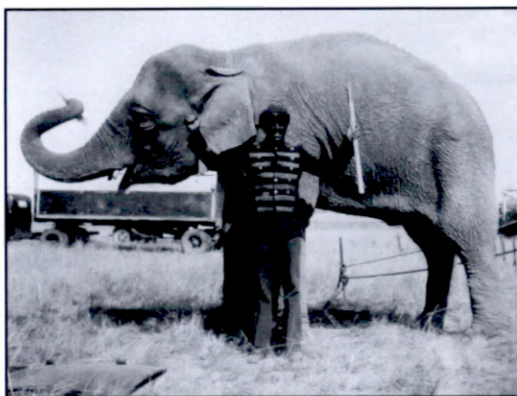
Eva hired tutors to continue Norma's education on the road. Off season the center-ring attraction attended classes at Gonzales Junior High School. She completed the 11th grade at San Marcos Baptist Academy.

The family grew even larger when Cork's brother, Jesse James "Jim" Plunkett, married Billie Gilles, one of Eva's daughters and Norma's half-sister. Billie, whose previous husband was an abusive alcoholic, continued working in the show's office in Gonzales until the spring of 1947, when she and Jim Plunkett left to join the Plunkett family's repertory show.

Norma and Corky moved into a newly built house on the former fairgrounds site. Ben Davenport also fashioned chicken-coop style housing for the exploding number of working men in winter quarters.

Already preoccupied with rehearsing new acts and building new wagons for the coming season, the show's personnel enjoyed—and endured—the arrival of seven baby elephants and four mahouts that Louie Reed had brought back from India in early 1947. The two males were named Charlie and Tommy, who much later received considerable ballyhoo as King Tusk on the Ringling show. The five females were Mary, Maud, Norma, Bessie and Conti. Even though Herbert "Pee Wee" Farrington was given the responsibility of taking care of the young bulls, almost everybody got in on the act.

"We had a week of getting used to



Little Nemo with her trainer Loose Shoes.

each other" at winter quarters, Norma remembers. "The mahouts had ropes around the babies, and they would whine and whine. They were wild, going in all directions. They'd walk all over you, just step on you. But we started getting them in line.

"That's basically where the training begins. You know, 'back up, and come here.' That's the part that was hard."

Ben Davenport designated a separate stock car on the train for the newly imported herd and the mahouts, which joined the circus in mid-season, she recalls.

In the meantime, newly-wed Norma Davenport Plunkett carried on with her established multi-elephant routines. She also presented a solo bull, Hank, who skipped around the track and then rolled a barrel in the ring. But only Red Freivogel could handle Nemo, at the time the only performing Asian male on the road, who also appeared in a solo turn. But the ill-tempered Nemo was becoming a liability around people. "Red used to leave between shows with Nemo and take him to the [elephant] car," Norma says. "Nemo was

Dailey Bros. Circus herd of elephants in Gonzales winter quarters.

the first one loaded, before the night show. And Nemo got to where he'd run into the backs of cars or combines [in the wheat belt]. He would run into them; he just hated them."

Death and the Bulls

Finally, Nemo was shot to death in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, on June 12, 1947. "My dad had to leave the show; he couldn't stand it," Norma recalls. "But you just couldn't take Nemo out any more."

Memories of Nemo's execution were revived as recently as April 2008, in a letter to the editor of the *Chambersburg Public Opinion*. Garnet Myers of St. Thomas, Pennsylvania, wrote that a local resident, "Merle (Hunk) Burns actually shot the elephant, about 25 years old, weighing approximately 4,300 pounds. . . . The carcass was removed to the Reess Rendering Plant at Greencastle for disposal. The hide was tanned at the Mercersburg Tannery."

Another elephant claimed the life of a much-admired circus wardrobe mistress in an accident at Lafayette, Indiana, on September 18. Revealing details behind the death of Mrs. Gertrude Burton, Norma explains that Dailey Bros. workmen had jammed tents, animals and people onto a small lot in Lafayette. The accident occurred when "Gertie" Burton decided to take a shortcut to get from the ladies' dressing tent to the costume wagon. Her path took her between the tent sidewalls and the backs of elephants on the picket line. The seamstress apparently tripped, bumping into Luna, one of the Weir elephants. Though there were no witnesses to the accident, circus people surmised that the elephant, which was blind in one eye, became startled and stepped on the



fallen wardrobe mistress, killing her instantly.

Norma kept on working Luna and the other four "Coca Cola" bulls in the ring without further incident, and the show kept on pulling in the post-war crowds in small towns hungry for entertainment other than the movies.

General Agent Harvey routed the circus as far east as Maine, where circus fan John J. Crowley visited friends on the show and reviewed performances in Lewiston and Portland in July, 1947. As Crowley reported in the January, 1948, *Hobby Bandwagon*, "the Big Top at the matinee in Lewiston had about 5,800 people, only about 200 short of a full house, but at night the show must have packed in 7,500 people as the Hippodrome track was packed right up to the ring curbs."

"Hold Your Horses"

"Many circus people think Ben Davenport is horse and elephant crazy because he carries so many bulls and horses. But for my money, the more he carries, the better we like it." That was precisely Davenport's intent. In a May 13, 1950, account in he insisted that "elephants are the backbone of a circus. I'd have 50 of 'em on the show tomorrow if I could get them. If [people] see a lot of them, they figure right away you've got a big show."

By most estimates, Davenport had up to 25 elephants on the road at one time. To accommodate the growing herd as well as other facets of the expanding show, Ben and Eva kept adding cars to their train, building it to an all-time high of 25 flats, stocks and sleepers for the 1948 tour.

A major reason for the expansion was the importing of nine more bulls. On January 9, 1948, Ben and Smokey Jones were on hand with a leased heated stock car at dockside in Boston harbor to accept delivery. They were named Tex, Nellie, Virginia, Mysore, Calcutta, Rosie, Eva, Butch and George. George was so small that he was kept in a bathtub at winter quarters. Unfortunately, illness claimed the baby's life.

And Beverly Kelley, the veteran Ringling Bros. publicist who had



Ben, Eva Davenport, right, and Singh posed with Little Butch.

joined Dailey Bros. to beef up its image as a major-league entry, had a field day promoting the new arrivals to wire services and national magazines.

A United Press story described Louie Reed's return from India, with a cargo which also included three zebras, four pythons and 200 monkeys. "Despite the roughness of the sea and delays caused by engine breakdowns, all the animals weathered the trip in good shape," the wire service reported. "Two representatives of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals inspected the cargo and decided it was in top-notch condition."

"Star attraction of the lot was

Baby Eva at the 1948 Republican Convention.



BABY EVA
Enlivens the Crowd at National Republican Convention in the Philadelphia Auditorium.

Butch, probably the smallest elephant ever seen in the United States. He stands three feet high and weighs less than 250 pounds. Two other elephants died en route—probably from heart trouble induced by the high seas."

While Davenport and Jones shepherded the hoof stock, clown Ernie Burch came to Boston from New York for special duty: riding herd over the mahouts and cages containing 35 baboons on the long rail journey to winter quarters.

Norma recalls her surprise to see her friend Ernie emerge from the leased passenger car when it arrived in Gonzales. He essentially had been the babysitter for the mahouts, who spoke no English.

"Little Butch," named after show treasurer Charles "Butch" Cohn, got special treatment at winter quarters—she was kept on the back porch of the Davenport family home. The baby bull also had her own wagon the train, with mahout Arumai Singh at her side at all times. Though Butch was much too young to be trained, Norma remembers the tiny elephant appearing in each performance for a walk-around under the big top, carrying Singh's bull hook in her trunk as announcer Tiger Bill Snyder ballyhooed the youngest star to applauding crowds.

Publicist Kelly's favorite among the babies was Eva, named after Mrs. Davenport, whom he promoted at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia on behalf of Senator Robert Taft's bid for the Presidential nomination.

"I reasoned the we should not take Little Butch from the circus and disappoint spectators who had paid to see America's second smallest baby elephant," Kelley said in



Harry Hammill, George Smith and Ben Davenport.

his 1982 biography *It Was Better Than Work*. "Instead, we would take Little Eva, who was the second smallest. Furthermore, I felt she had even more personality."

Another former Ringling publicist, Frank Morrissey, made arrangements to house Eva in a veterinary college animal compound near the convention center, with mahout Pairu at her side constantly. Because of Eva's small stature, she weighed about 700 pounds at the time, she easily sauntered through the front door of the GOP headquarters hotel, where she took a pen in trunk at the registration desk—with flashbulbs popping everywhere, of course. Her patriotic-theme blanket read, "I'm Little Eva from Dailey Bros. Circus—I'm Simply Daft About Taft."

Although Taft lost his presidential bid, the circus was the clear winner from the resulting nationwide publicity. Meanwhile, Butch and the growing Dailey Bros. troupe were attracting large crowds in the Midwest.

By all accounts, the performance was worth waiting for, filling five rings for the first time. The tear-down and set up in each town was equally spectacular to those who witnessed it. (Journalist-to-be James Foster writes of his brief encounter with the Dailey show in the accompanying sidebar.)

The first wagon to be taken off the flats at virtually every stop was a combination ticket wagon and air calliope. Ben, always the early riser, had a standing rule that the automatic calliope would begin its wailing as the circus train pulled into each community—about 7:00 a.m. or thereafter. Then, an eight-hitch team of Percheron baggage stock pulled the bright red wagon—with the calliope's raucous sounds still bellowing forth from its pipes—into the town's business district. Unless city officials intervened, the other circus wagons also took the downtown route to the lot.

A stilt walker, Charlie Saunders, and his sign-board-carrying wife Hilda remained behind to roam the downtown streets with Chief Sugar Brown's band of Indians. Their goal was to reinforce the dramatic posters and building daubs that the circus had arrived.

The calliope wagon also remained on Main Street, where ticket sellers began peddling seats for the two daily performances—at 3:00 and 8:00 p.m. Since Dailey Bros. played the various towns *sans* sponsors, the circus did not have to bother with advance ticket sales. About 1:00 p.m. the horse-drawn wagon departed for the lot, where it joined the office-ticket wagon manned by Butch Cohn and his crew.

Illness, Death Strike the Lot

Illness and death plagued the show's 1948 tour from the outset.

Five managers and workers died that year.

Life-threatening illnesses also waylaid the show's co-owners.

Mrs. Davenport, who had kept her long-standing gall bladder condition secret from the family, entered a hospital on June 13 at Lockport, New York, for emergency surgery.

During the operation, one of her lungs collapsed. "She almost died," Norma recalls. Ben flew Eva's sister, Mrs. Ethel Stock from Quincy, as the circus train pulled out for its next jump. On being released from the hospital several weeks later, Eva purchased a new seven-passenger Cadillac which sister Ethel, who normally took tickets at the front door, piloted for the journey back to the

show. To assist with her recovery, Mrs. Davenport also took along a hospital nurse, whom Norma remembers only as "Nylon." "And Nylon was a character. Mother said she had her blowing up balloons in the back of the car, blowing her lungs up."

Less than two weeks after Eva rejoined the show, Ben had to be rushed to a hospital on July 26 while the show was playing Trenton, Missouri. He was transferred to Omaha and then to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where the cause of his debilitating illness initially stumped a team of doctors. Finally, his sickness was diagnosed as typhoid fever—the same disease that killed his father just before Ben was born. While Ben was in the hospital, his long-time boss canvas man, Ralph Noble, also was stricken by typhoid fever. Following a 10-day illness, the general superintendent died on August 18 in Watertown, South Dakota. Another show veteran, Paul Pyle, took over Noble's responsibilities.

Norma says her mother attributed Ben's illness to the maid in the family car who "didn't keep things clean. She fired her."

George Smith to the Rescue

In her husband's absence, Eva hired an experienced Ringling operations executive, George Smith, as general manager on the Dailey show. Employees, almost all of them extremely loyal to the Davenports, watched warily as Smith eyeballed circus operations for several days. "He just walked around and made notes," Norma remembers.

Smith's first action left no doubt as to who was boss. He fired a well-established performer who had sneaked back to the train during the day for a romantic tryst. "After a certain time in the morning, you didn't go to the train unless you had a note from the doctor."

Word spread quickly. "Jesus, that shocked everybody. And maybe George did it because it was the proper thing to do."

Smith also provided guidance to trainmaster Steamline Frizzell on different ways of loading the flats.

But, Norma reports, "They all liked him and respected him. The way he

moved in there was phenomenal." (See Robert Loeffler's two-part series on Smith in 2006 *Bandwagons*.)

Norma and her mother were stunned when they visited Ben at the Mayo clinic. "My dad weighed about 250 pounds most of his adult life. When we saw him in the hospital, he was down to 135 pounds."

Following his stay at Mayo's and three weeks of recovery at the Pete Lindemann home in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Ben returned to the show at Liberal, Kansas, on October 14. That same night the show lost a member of the big top crew, Ed Julius, who was struck and killed by a passenger train speeding through the Liberal yards.

Norma said her father bonded almost immediately with his new general manager, who, like Davenport, had previously served prison time. Smith was widely viewed as a scapegoat in the aftermath of the deadly Ringling Bros. big top fire in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 6, 1944.

"That liked to have destroyed George when they put him in jail. It hurt him. It really did," says Ms. Cristiani, referring to Smith's bouts of alcoholism.

The sharing of jackpots about their respective jail experiences "loosened George up," Norma reflects. "I mean, George got over it by talking about it. He was a very fine gentleman."

Toward the end of the season the gruesome discovery of a worker's body shook the troupe and attracted national media coverage. Workmen unloading a wagon at Springfield, Missouri, uncovered a badly-bruised corpse. Police swarmed the lot and plunged the show into a greater-than-normal scene of turmoil and rumors. Had the dead prop hand been murdered? (Consult the next *Bandwagon* for the bewildering answers.)

Also as the 1948 season tailed down, Ben and Eva, whose 18-year marriage had endured the strains of circus life, separated—they never obtained a divorce. Harry Hammill bought out Mrs. Davenport's interest in the circus for a reported \$30,000 in cash.

Eva plowed her proceeds back into the show, signing a promissory note

with Hammill, for what would be its record-breaking inaugural tour of Canada in 1949.

Next: Good times, bad times in Canada. Dailey Bros. makes its last stand.

DAILEY SHOW OFFERED BLACK ENTERTAINERS

By a twist of fate 60 years ago, a sideshow singer and dancer known as Lucile (her last name likely was Nash) became the first—and only—black performer under the Dailey Bros. Circus big top.

Minstrel band leader Johnny B. Williams considered Lucile to be so "homely" that he kicked her off his sideshow troupe, says Norma Davenport Cristiani.

Norma remembers Lucile only by her first name. Of course, this was also true of many blacks and others on the show, who were known to co-workers by their given names or nicknames. In addition to performing in the sideshow as musicians, the "colored" workers functioned as elephant and livestock hands, cooks,

close working relationship in the backyard. She remembers that when Johnnie B. Williams and his musicians joined the Dailey Bros. sideshow in the mid-1940s, Lucile was a featured singer and dancer, possessing a strong, powerful voice.

At the start of the 1948 season, however, Lucile approached show co-owner Ben Davenport in tears, despairing over Williams refusing to hire her back because she was just too homely to suit his tastes.

As Norma remembers, "Lucile was crying, 'I don't know what I'm going to do.'"

"So my dad said, 'Lucile, why don't you go over there and help my daughter, and watch her trunks.'"

Davenport also saw the performing potential in the personable black woman. "She learned the swinging ladder, and my dad put her in front of the black section." This would have been outside Ring 5, Hall suggests. "I've often thought of that," Norma says. "She was the first black person I had ever heard of being on the show" in the main performance.



Johnny Williams and his side show band.

truck drivers, train porters, maids and, most importantly, as members of the canvas crews.

A recent search of the 1948 Dailey Bros. route book by collector-historian John Polacsek showed a "Lucile Nash" as a performer in the sideshow band. Ward Hall, who joined the Dailey sideshow in 1946, also remembers Lucile only by her first name.

But both Ms. Cristiani and Hall vividly remember various African Americans on the show. Norma recalls Lucile fondly because of their

In addition to her aerial routines, Lucile appeared in the opening spec, wearing a military-style coat and leading several dogs around the track—one of them Miss Davenport's. Norma sheepishly admits that this was a ruse to get around her father's edict that performers could not keep animals unless they performed in the show. It was a loosely

enforced rule, Hall adds, pointing out that the wife of a mob boss kept her six dogs tied behind the sideshow tent. Furthermore, Davenport insisted that the dogs be housed in cages in the possum belly of the canvas wagon for transportation on a flat car.

But Lucile's primary responsibility, in addition to assisting Norma with numerous costume changes during the main performance and Wild West after show, was to keep a sharp lookout over Norma's trunk in the dressing tent. That's where the Davenports' daughter stashed the receipts from the tax box, which she collected from pass holders prior to

each performance. Lucile carried the tax-box money to the family's private rail car each night to be included in Eva Davenport's daily count.

"She was tough, I'm telling you," Norma recalls. "Nobody got around that trunk." These days, the weather-beaten trunk occupies a prominent place in the home Norma shares in Sarasota with Pete Cristiani.

The first African-American worker Ms. Cristiani remembers on her parents' show was a man she knew only as Rodney, who was the caretaker of elephants Nemo and Rosie and a pair of camels which Ben Davenport acquired from "Honest Bill" Newton in 1941. Unfortunately, Rodney and a white co-worker were killed the following year when their circus truck's brakes gave out on a steep grade and crashed, as Eva Davenport told a Kansas newspaper reporter in 1942.

"With tent shows, we always had regulars that you could depend on," Norma explains. "And we used to have five or six black men that were always there. And my dad used to take care of them." She particularly remembers the cook at winter quarters that regularly went on weekend drinking benders. "Every Saturday he got thrown in jail, and they'd keep him there until Sunday. We had another cook who would take his place."

Ronnie was another African American who "worked his heart out for the show," Norma recalls. "He always looked old. All the time I knew him he looked old. And the porters—we got help in those days that were just different [from modern days]. People wanted to work. There wasn't much money around. And they were friendly, enjoyed themselves, and they were treated with respect."

One of the most familiar faces on the big top crew was Calvin Spikes, the "punk pusher." Spikes' main task at each lot was to gather the kids who wanted to earn passes and show them how to spread the canvas, recalls Hall.

Ward Hall contributed names—and memories—of other blacks from his three and a half years on Dailey Bros. He recalls the minstrel band, leader "Johnny B" pounding a bass drum, helping to draw the tip while

standing behind the bally platform. Inside, Williams was the emcee or "interlocutor" for the band's portion of the performance. He also served as straight man for the black comedians—"Bo" Jordan, "Grapefruit" and "Happy Jack," the later also being the snare drummer. Other regulars included "Duke" Walker on trumpet—he died in 1948 while on tour with the show, Hall recalls; and Elmo Tanner on alto saxophone. Johnny B Williams' wife, Clarissa, was a singer-dancer. Another singer, Sweetie Mae Tumkins, was married to the headwaiter in the cookhouse, Tommy Tumkins. Sweetie Mae also served as the maid in the Davenport family car.

Hall says the side show band was supposed to carry a complement of 15 performers, but it seldom, if ever, reached that number because of the transient nature of musicians.

Hall relates a jackpot involving another sideshow performer, whom he remembers only as "Bonnie." While the circus train was en route, the inebriated singer abruptly terminated a late-night spat with her boyfriend by leaping out of the segregated part of a sleeper.

The locomotive traveled almost another mile before the brakeman was able to make an emergency stop, Hall recalls. As the train slowly backed up, anxious lookouts found Bonnie sitting on a rail, dazed and sobbing. Luckily, she escaped with minor injuries. That incident, however, earned her the nickname "Suicide Bonnie."

CIRCUS HELPED "FOSTER" YOUNG FAN'S INTEREST

Jim Foster wasn't aware of the illicit games of chance when he stepped on the Dailey Bros. lot at Washington, Iowa, on July 17, 1948. He just wanted to earn a pass to the circus. What he got was an opportunity to be an honest-to-goodness clown, if only for a brief spell.

That experience set Foster on the trail of following circuses, which ultimately led to his becoming the editor of *White Tops* magazine for the Circus Fans of America.

From his home in the Piedmont region of Virginia, Foster interrupted his circus-chasing adventures—visit-

ing the Cole Bros. lot at Harrisonburg on April 23—to dredge up the memories of that perfect circus day in southeast Iowa 60 years ago.

In the summer of 1948, the soon-to-be high school senior hitchhiked 17 miles from his hometown of Wellman (population about 900 then as now, he points out) to Washington, a town of some 6,700 people. This was the type of community that Dailey Bros.' veteran general agent, R. M. Harvey—himself a native Iowan—loved to book. These rural dates usually produced good business, even in rainy weather.

Setting the stage for his tale, Foster recalled, "This was after the war. Soldiers were coming home and having families. The Midwest was starved for entertaining."

Let Foster pick up the story in his own words (historian John Polacsek was able to pinpoint the date from his route book collection, Ward Hall furnished the names of the clowns who took Jim under their wings, and Norma Davenport Cristiani provided the names of a few other performers): "I hopped out next to the Armory lot on the edge of town and got 'hired' with a swarm of other kids to help put up the big top. I carried seat planks and got a big splinter in my finger. No stopping now, I kept working until the job was done and figured I had to walk to a drugstore and buy some tweezers to get the splinter out. The involvement in being allowed to help set up the seating was such a big thrill that I remember really hating to leave the lot. Could they get along without me? I carried that souvenir splinter in my billfold for years.

"I came right back and hung around the backdoor all afternoon. I was transfixed by the activity, thrilled to be that close to real live horses and pretty girls and acrobats. Nobody paid much attention to me. I tried to make myself invisible for fear somebody would run me off. But nobody did. I don't remember the animals in detail anything about the performance except one act. A slack wire artist had a drunk act, and to this day when I hear the song "Show Me The Way To Go Home," I can feel the warmth of the Iowa summer and the smell of the canvas.

I wasn't aware of gift, didn't, in fact, know what gift was." The wire walker may have been Mario Ivanoff, who was also featured in a horizontal bar act on Dailey Bros.

"I was still in my spot near the backdoor as preparations began for the evening performance. Of course I'd watched the clowns. Finally, the two show clowns, Jack Jackson and Walter Scheyler, called me over. (I'd remembered them as Jackson somebody and Annabelle; thanks to Ward Hall for supplying proper names.) They asked if I wanted to be a clown for the evening. Would I? Yes! They put me in a red and white costume—in truth I recall it was pretty dirty and tattered—and made up my face. The one gag I remember must have had something falling from the sky because they said, 'Just watch us. When we begin to turn around, all you have to do is look up, run around with your arms out like you're trying to catch something, and then fall down.' I've had a lot of thrills in my life, but I remember those feelings deep down as if it were yesterday.

"After the performance, I was so excited I took off the costume, thanked Mr. Jackson and Mr. Scheyler and headed out to the highway to hitch a ride home. I couldn't wait to tell my parents all about it. Some friends of the family who had recognized me in the performance happened to drive by, spotted me in the dark and delivered me home. When I walked in my folks were somewhat startled. I'd failed to remove the clown makeup from my face. From that time on I believe they feared, not without justification, that I might run away with the circus.

"In fact, a few years later I did get to spend a couple of weeks on the Ringling show in Chicago. A man who worked for my father had graduated from Texas A&M with Dr. J. Y. Henderson, the famed Ringling veterinarian. When he learned I was interested in circuses he wrote a letter of introduction to Doc Henderson, who was most gracious. He said I could hang out around his



Unloading the train in 1947.

office-clinic-dressing room wagon during the day. I stayed at night in a downtown hotel. Doc had his hands full. His son, Donald, who was just my age, was on the show. Also, a son of one of the Mayo doctors in Rochester, Minnesota, was traveling with the show, Doc keeping watch to see that the boy took his diabetes medicine. So here were three young teenage boys. We had free run of the backyard. We went in and out of the big top at will. Bounced on a trampoline. I especially liked to be around when Doc, having changed into costume, would step out from the privacy curtain just as a groom brought his favorite horse around so he could ride in spec. How cool was that! The theme was Picnic in the Park, heavy with horses and carriages. He explained he needed to keep an eye on the horses because it was easier to treat an injury when you saw it. We boys sometimes ate in the dining tent. Some days a big black Cadillac would pull onto the back lot and Cecil B. de Mille, wearing his trademark jodhpurs and boots, would emerge to study camera angles for his upcoming epic movie. Also, an artist was making sketches for the movie.

"One day I summoned courage to approach Pat Valdo. A tall man, he wore a suit and gray fedora, he was personnel director of The Greatest Show on Earth. He was THE man. I asked him for a job. He spoke kindly, 'Son, you go back to school and get your education. Then if you still want a job, come see me.' Feeling as though I'd spoken to God, I did as he commanded. I went back to get my education. Before I left the lot a few days later, however, I stopped by the green commissary wagon and

bought a couple of RB&BB tee shirts. They're still in my drawer . . . lasting treasures.

"Since college didn't offer courses in circus-ing, I became a newspaper reporter and wrote about the circus whenever it came to town. It was a natural. Rudy Bundy loved to be interviewed about his dark green private car that

carried RB (often mistaken to mean Ringling Bros.) in gold script on the side. And Henry Ringling North once ended an interview with the flattering aside that I knew almost as much about the show as he did. One year I took blind kids to the circus: 'Mr. Foster, I hear the fire. Am I looking at the fire?' as the big cats leaped through the hoop, and, while walking hand in hand with a chimp, 'Gee, Mr. Foster, he has fingernails just like you.' On that one I got thank-you notes in braille. And Fay Alexander, once a star aerialist whom I found doing a backfiring stunt-car act on a tiny show in a tiny town, recalled for me how he did 30 or so triples dressed in drag while filming a movie, and he offered me an early-morning beer. Later, in Washington, the Felds were buying and then selling and then buying the Ringling show. It was fun keeping track for the CFA but I really wasn't involved.

"Then, a couple of years after I retired from Scripps-Howard Newspapers, the editorship of the *White Tops* opened up, and I agreed to take it on. That was at the 1988 national CFA convention in Williamsburg, Va. At the 2000 convention in Sarasota, I handed the reins over to Bob Goldsack.

Author's Note: After Foster e-mailed his comments at the request of this writer (who ironically had submitted a Dailey Bros. story to Foster in 2000 for publication in *White Tops*), the former editor added one final touch by phone: "Both of the 1940-era Dailey Bros. clowns were "so nice to me," Foster mused, "that I persuaded my dad to go out and buy a carton of Camel cigarettes. I sent it to them with a note of thanks."

Barney Carroll

By Stuart Thayer

William Barnett Carroll, known as "Barney" for most of his days, died in Westchester County, New York on July 14, 1889. He was seventy-three years old and had retired eleven years earlier. His last season was 1878, in which he acted as a ring-master for Adam Forepaugh. The year before that he was still in the ring, doing a riding act for the John Murray Circus at the age of sixty-one and had a lip cancer not disfigured him he might have ridden for several more years. Carroll felt that he couldn't appear in public with his ailment, so he turned to training others in the art of riding.

He was born in 1816 and left his father's farm in Tennessee at the age of twelve to join a circus. If this account is accurate Carroll had a career of fifty years, more than the life expectancy of a nineteenth century man. His only rival in that category would appear to be Samuel P. Stickney. Because the early years of any performer's life is difficult to document, we can't be sure just when these men were first on the scene. Stickney, for instance, initially appears in advertising in 1824, but must have had a year or two as an unheralded apprentice before then. Generally speaking, the smaller the circus the earlier a performer would appear in ads, as a small show wanted many names in their program, so as to appear as grand as possible.

Barney Carroll signed on as a groom with a small company, the title of which is unknown to us. In his obituary in the *New York Clipper* this was in 1826; the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* has it in 1828. He was apprenticed to the rider George Sweet in either 1830 or 1831. Since Sweet and Carroll were the same age, this seems to be misinformation. Perhaps Sweet's accepted birthdate, from several sources, of 1816 was actually earlier. Sweet

was a pupil of John Rogers, father of the famous Charles J. Rogers, and had been riding since 1823.

In any event, Carroll appeared on the roster of the Yeaman Circus, owned by Asa T. Smith, in 1831. He was fifteen years-old and performed a bareback act. "Master Carroll, will turn a back somersault from his horse," said the ads. This was done from the horse to the ground; it was not a somersault on the horse, which was fifteen years in the future.

Neither Carroll nor Sweet are on any roster we have for 1832. Sweet rode for Nathan Howes in 1833, but Carroll was not mentioned by that show. That doesn't mean he wasn't present, of course. The next evidence of him is his name in the notices for French, Hobby & Co.'s Menagerie and Circus. Since this troupe was on the road in the southeastern states in the winter of 1834-35, as well as the summer tour on either side. Carroll was probably with them in both seasons. Here he did a scenic act, "Soldier's Leave of Absence," a dumb-show on horseback illustrating the arrival home of a soldier on furlough. George Sweet was not with

Mlle M. Carroll, the Great Lady Equestrienne, featured on an 1872 Great Eastern poster. Harvard Theater collection.



Mlle M. CARROLL, the Great Lady Equestrienne. Now with the Great Eastern Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Circus and Balloon Show

the company nor did the two men ever appear together again. This, combined with the fact that Carroll was not listed as "Master Carroll" leads us to believe that his apprenticeship had ended.

He was then successively employed by Joseph Palmer, Noel E. Waring, and Ludlow & Smith. Sometime in 1840 he married fifteen year-old Mary Ann Spragg, a native of New York state. Her father, John Spragg, may have been a circus man. We find a clown named John Sprague on the 1838 H. H. Fuller circus and the 1839 J. W. Stocking show. Since Mary Ann did not appear in advertising until 1843, we assume Barney taught her to ride.

D. R. Lines & Co.'s Philadelphia Circus and Menagerie promoted Carroll to the position of equestrian director in 1842, a sign of his competence. He switched to the Welch & Delavan circus in midseason when Raymond (who owned the Lines troupe) disbanded the circus portion, replacing it with Herr Driesbach's lion act. It was Welch & Delavan that presented the largest winter show seen in America to that time. Twenty-one riders, all the best-known names in the business, were on the bill at the Park Theatre in New York in January and February, 1843.

That summer tour was with Rockwell & Stone. Carroll was doing a two-horse act by then, what we call Roman riding today. That winter, 1843-44, Mary Ann Carroll made her debut in show business as an entry rider for James Raymond's Olympic Circus. She did the same sort of thing for Spalding over the three subsequent years.

Barney next mastered the double somersault. Spalding billed him as "Mr. B. Carroll, the undaunted equestrian and great acrobatic wonder, who will throw a double somer-

sault, turning twice in the air before alighting, a feat never before accomplished by any person, and will be admitted to be the most daring feat ever witnessed in the world!"

This is an interesting claim, since Hiram Franklin is generally credited with performing the first double somersault from a standing position--as opposed to one from a springboard. Furthermore, Franklin first did it when he was with Raymond's Olympic Circus the same winter show of 1843-44 that the Carrolls were with. Did they learn it together? It is not unusual for athletes to extend themselves in competition one with another.

Just one season after Carroll was advertised by Spalding as above, Spalding was announcing that Henry Gardner of his troupe was the only man in the world turning a double from the ground. This may mean that Carroll was no longer doing the turn.

The 1840's saw a great flowering of new specialties in both riding and ground acrobatics. This could have come about because of heightened competition. The Panic of 1837 so decimated the business--all types of businesses--that the number of shows declined and therefore the number of jobs for performers. Only those who could compete with new skills were able to find work.

Barney Carroll copied Nathans' act in the same season, 1844, having Master Henry Jennings as his top mounter. Later, Master William Gardner was Carroll's partner. On July 4 in Detroit a firecracker frightened their horse which threw the riders. Young Gardner was considerably injured.

In 1846 Spalding advertised "W. B. Carroll the best single horse rider (without saddle or bridle) in the United States. He will leap banners, scarfs, etc., and conclude by carrying LaPetite Miss Madigan erect on his head, without the use of his hands, balancing the beautiful little creature in perfect safety, with his fleet steed Hamlet at swift pace. . . ."

As for Mary Ann Carroll, she had progressed to a scenic act by this season and Spalding's writer described

her as "the charming female equestrian in a fancy act of equitation, the Nymph of the Floating Scarf."

Scarf acts had been introduced from Europe only a short while by 1846; Marie Macarte was the best-known of practitioners of the art. Standing on the back of a running horse the equestrienne, using only a scarf or shawl for a prop, would present a variety of characters. In one review it was reported that Macarte imitated an Arabian maid, a pious nun, a French peasant girl, a Circassian slave, a Spanish senora and a fortune-telling gypsy. Each change was accompanied by different musical pieces, giving us a view of the versatility of the circus bands of the day.

The Carrolls went to other shows, beginning in 1847. They were with Seth B. Howes, June, Titus & Co., and Colonel Mann in the next three seasons. Mary Ann's younger brother, Levi Spragg, apprenticed himself to Barney for the 1849 tour with Mann, but does not seem to have persevered beyond then. We do not find his name again in a circus roster.

A second youngster joined the troupe for the 1849 tour by Col. Mann's Grand Canal Circus. This was another Mary Ann Spragg, a niece of Mrs. Carroll. Her father is listed in the family records as being either George or Daniel Spragg, it is not certain which. She was born in New York on November 12, 1844, so she was five years-old at her debut in the ring. She took Levi Spragg's place as the infant who stood on Barney's head in the riding act. A Kingston, Ontario newspaper described them in this way:

"Mr. Carroll, as a two-horse rider, is unsurpassed; his wife is as graceful as she is bold and fearless; and their little girl is a perfect prodigy of talent and intrepidity. Standing on the head of her father, wholly unsupported, while he is riding his act, is a sight once seen never to be obliterated from memory. It is the most astonishing feat of the circle yet attempted. Mr. Carroll himself is second only

to Levi J. North or Juan Hernandez."

Another unusual thing about little Marie Carroll was that she also entered the cage of a leopard. "Playing with and teasing that furious animal," the ads said. This is almost unbelievable. The possibility exists that someone accompanied her into the cage. And the leopard, "Amenia," was a family pet, yet a six-year child is still pretty tender meat for a wild animal act. Marie performed with the cat for six years.

In 1850 Carroll leased his horses to Dan Rice, and the family toiled for the famous clown's show. Rice apparently couldn't keep up the payments for the horses so Carroll sold the lease to Spalding & Rogers and took his crew to that circus. Rice without the Carrolls, without the horses, proceeded to present what has since become famous as his "One-Horse Show." Spalding then advertised that his company included "most of the so-called Dan Rice Circus."

Spalding & Rogers had two circuses in 1851, one under C. J. Rogers' management, the other under Den Stone. The Carrolls were with the latter, and it appears that this was the first year in which Marie Carroll, at six, was presenting a riding act. If true, she was most likely riding a pony. The bills described her as an eight year-old in her leopard act, "with her faithful dog Fidele entering a leopard's den, in fulfillment of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, The Leopard shall lie down with the Kid, and a little child shall lead them." This bit of sanctimony had first been used in connection with Master Hayman, who was part of Van Amburgh's act in the early 1830's.

Family tradition has it that Marie's uncles wanted her brought up as a proper lady, not a circus performer, and that Barney and Mary Ann adopted her in order to forestall losing her. They had no children of their own. The only proof of this we have found is that when she married, in 1864, Marie used the name Mary Ann Carroll.

Eighteen-fifty-two was spent with Spalding & Rogers, 1853 with Mann, Moore & Co. We haven't located them in 1854. The next two seasons the family toured with George F. Bailey & Co. Barney was the equestrian director and rode a four-horse and a



six-horse act. Mrs. Carroll was still presenting her scarf act. Marie was now advertised as entering a den of wild animals and displaying her indomitable courage, equal to the celebrated Van Amburgh. It sounds as if the leopard act had been supplemented, but we doubt that it was. In 1855 she was ten, still advertised as being eight. In 1856 they used her correct age.

The contract between the Carrolls and G. F. Bailey & Co. is in the collection of the Ringling Museum in Sarasota. It is one of the few mid-century documents we have, and it makes interesting reading.

Their salary was \$140 per week. Sixty dollars was for Carroll, twenty dollars for Mrs. Carroll, fifty dollars for Marie, and ten dollars for the use of the leopard. Eighty dollars of this was to be paid to Mrs. Carroll, and "not otherwise," indicating that she and Barney separated their money.

Bailey agreed to furnish a groom, who was to be paid eighteen dollars a month; to pay the expenses of carrying the family--three adults, three children--from New York to Hillsboro, Ohio, the opening date. He was to furnish a span of horses for the family's transportation during the season, and, of course, feed and lodge them, their horses and the leopard.

Mrs. Carroll was not to be required to appear in more than two performances in any one day, nor more than twice in any performance, nor at night in the grand entry.

The show would furnish a cage for the leopard and one of the two horses necessary to haul it. In addition, a separate carriage was to be provided for the use of W. B. Carroll.

The usual injury clause was included, which said that an injured performer would receive a week's salary while unable to work.

We draw the conclusion that the Carrolls were not getting along very well, given the separated salaries and transportation. We also venture to say that Mrs. Carroll was a woman who knew what she wanted.

The three children mentioned were Marie, of course, and two boys named William and Charles who, in the practice of the time, took their master's name during apprenticeship. William Carroll kept the name after he was his own man, and was in

the business for many years.

In 1857 W. B. Carroll became a proprietor. He was then forty-one years old and had been performing for twenty-five years. The Antonio Brothers, the famous acrobatic troupe, had decided to start a circus, and they became Barney's partners. They called their new venture Antonio, Carroll & Co. Essentially the troupe was the five Carrolls and three Antonios. There were six other people and a band.

Their route lay west from St. Louis into Missouri, Nebraska and Iowa. They were the first circus to appear in Omaha. They couldn't have chosen a worse time to start a business. The Panic of 1857 combined with inclement weather made sour music the entire season. The cost of horses and of feed rose, especially in the West, and it is possible no one made much money that year. However, only three shows appear to have been bankrupted. In any event, Antonio & Carroll did not go out in 1858. The Antonios became partners of J. W. Wilder, and the Carrolls signed on as employees.

Davis & Crosby's French and American Circus took to the road in 1859, and the five Carrolls were with it. We do not find them in 1860, and there is a good chance they were not performing. We know that in 1861 Carroll was operating a hotel in Westchester, New York, so he might have been at that task in 1860 as well.

If his intention was to retire from the ring he failed, as in 1861 he was once again a partner in a field show, this time with Henry P. Madigan in Madigan & Carroll's Union Circus. The company was out only the one season.

In 1863 Barney and Mrs. Carroll started out on Nixon's Cremorne Circus and Madam Macarte's European Circus. An October roster for Maginley & Van Vleck has Barney as equestrian director. The troupe worked its way from St. Louis to New Orleans where the Carrolls left it.

By March 1864 they were with

Carey's Great World's Circus, one of the first shows to play New Orleans after its capture by Union forces. G. F. Bailey & Co. appears to have been the first to reach the city.

Marie Carroll was not with the family in 1863, riding instead for J. M. Nixon. On January 4 1864 she married Benjamin R. Maginley in Memphis using the name Marie E. Carroll. This must be proof that she had been adopted by her aunt. She was nineteen, Maginley was twenty-nine. He had been an actor and was to be one again after he left the circus business. Our earliest reference to him is when he was stage manager for the People's Dramatic Company of Cincinnati and Louisville in 1856. His 1863 circus, in which the rider Oliver Bell was a partner, seems to have been his initial circus connection. From the time of her marriage until her death in 1874 Marie rode for whatever show Maginley was with. Beginning in 1866 he was a clown, and he continued with comedy roles when he turned to the theatre. During the 1870's he acted in the winter and went under canvas in the summer.

The Carrolls were with Marie and Ben Maginley in July 1864 on Maginley & Bell's Monitor Circus, which was then in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. This company was a continuation of the Maginley & Van Vleck operation of 1863. We haven't found any mention of the family in 1865, so we assume they were still together in that season.

The family was with Haight and Chambers in 1866. Barney was equestrian manager (i.e., in charge of the horse acts) and a two, four and six-horse rider. This was quite a schedule for a fifty year-old man. Mrs. Carroll and Marie were riders and Maginley clowning.

Marie was the star of the show, "whose grace, style, elegance and trepidity are beyond any rivalry." The New Orleans newspapers lauded her with:

"There is but one Marie, and we never can expect to look upon her



like again." (*Picayune*)

"Our city has gone Marie-mad, nor is it to be wondered at. Such grace, such skill, such witching horsemanship is seen but once in a lifetime and then never forgotten." (*Southern Star*)

From her pictures, we judge Marie to be a very pretty woman, and this was doubtless part of her attraction as a performer, yet there is no denying that she was very accomplished at dressage. Carroll and his son-in-law framed Maginley & Carroll's Great Consolidated Circus in 1867. Maginley was general manager, Carroll the equestrian manager, and J. H. Owen the director. Owen was probably an investor. This seems to have been a "gilly" show. That the owners advertised it well cannot be doubted. The McGregor, Iowa paper said that the circus had built "a town of boards" to display their bills and that it alone was worth fifty-cents to see. In this season Marie was using the name Marie Elize, which she used for the remainder of her career. As an aside to this show in this season we must repeat what the *Clipper* claimed, which was that Maginley was afraid of the Indians so he wouldn't travel beyond Omaha.

Annie Carroll made her debut on Maginley & Carroll in 1868. She was a "bound" girl, according to the family genealogy, and served an apprenticeship until she was eighteen. We don't know her birth date. In 1869, on DeHaven's Circus, the family was advertised as W. B., Mrs., Naomi and Master Willie. Since Annie wasn't listed we don't know if Naomi was she or some other child plucked from an orphanage. In any event, it was Annie who rode standing on W. B.'s head just as Marie Elize had done so many years before.

Eighteen-seventy found the family on the John W. Robinson Circus, not to be confused with the original John Robinson show. Willie and Annie were both present, Willie as a bare-back rider.

The family was with the Empire City Circus in 1871 and the Great Eastern in 1872, 1873 and 1874. On the 1873 show they were all together again, as Ben Maginley was the manager, and, of course, Marie Elize was a rider. The children were Annie, Willie, Cornelia and Laura. In 1874 a

new lad, Dolly Varden, joined the troupe.

Dolly Varden Carroll (1871-), named for the Dickens character in *Barnaby Rudge* was not a girl as was the fictional character. Dolly (sometimes Dollie) was apparently a dwarf. He took on the task of standing on Carroll's head in the two-horse riding.

Ben Maginley was manager of and partner in Maginley & Co. Circus, Museum and Menagerie in 1874, accompanied, of course, by Marie Elize. He was manager of Melville, Maginley & Cook in 1875, then spent two seasons as a clown and, apparently, devoted himself exclusively to the theatre after that.

According to Dingess, Barney opened a riding school in Van Ness, New York in 1874. Van Ness was a stop on the Harlem River branch of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. Other than Carroll's establishment it contained a reformatory. We find ads for the practice building in the *Clipper* in 1883.

Barney Carroll was equestrian director and a rider for Cameron's Grand Oriental Circus in 1875. Willie, Annie and Dolly Varden were with him. This outfit was framed in Boston by J. V. Cameron, who had been boss hostler on Maginley's 1874 show. The assumption has to be made that Cameron leased horses to Maginley; a boss hostler's wages were not of the magnitude to provide the capital for show business.

It was not unusual for a horse dealer to provide a circus with animals and then hire on to keep an eye on them. This was the method by which John V. O'Brien became interested in the circus.

Eighteen seventy-six found the Carrolls with Van Amburgh's Great Golden Menagerie, and 1877 with John H. Murray's Circus. On the latter, Carroll, still a viable athlete at sixty-one, did a two-horse and four-horse act. It was his last hurrah as a rider.

He served one more year, becoming equestrian director for Adam Forepaugh in 1878. As we said, he developed a disfiguring lip cancer and withdrew from public appearances. If not for that, he might have

gone on for several years more. He was a consummate professional. The *New York Clipper* once said of him that he was always on time for work, and that he went straight home after the performance. That this was unusual must be assumed merely by its mention. After he retired he taught riding, mostly to amateurs.

John Dingess' assessment of him reads, "Not only was he an artist of superior ability as an equestrian, but he taught and gave to the world many superior performers, among them two of his own daughters, Marie and Annie Carroll. . . as an equestrian manager he had few equals, and his two-horse carrying act with the little waif, Dolly Varden, was one of the most beautiful feats performed in the arena."

The only statement we have found from Carroll appears in the *Clipper* of 20 July 1889 in his obituary. "With (the Great Eastern Circus), as the deceased used to say sadly, began the demoralization of the business, so far as artistic work is concerned. The putting of two rings in the circus was the root of all evil. It made a big resplendent affair, but one in which the actors had no incentive to do fine work."

Annie, Willie and Dolly Varden all persevered in the business. Annie, died in 1928.

Longevity as a performer, dedication to his work, and most importantly, honor from his contemporaries, would seem to signalize William B. Carroll's career. Today he is forgotten, which is why we wrote this piece. Our hope is that it will bring back to his name a bit of its former luster.

Our thanks go to Rhoda-Glenn Halm of Westlake Village, California, great-granddaughter of Mary Ann Spragg Carroll, for the genealogical information she supplied to us.

NOTES:

Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, 21 July 1889 (obit).

Baltimore *Sun*, 16 March 1846 (Macarte).

(Kingston) *Daily British Whig*, 9 August 1847.

John S. Dingess, unpublished manuscript, Hertzberg Circus Collection, p. 158-159.

The Circus Advance In 1902

The following articles, "Power of the Poster," "Two Big Shows," "Louis E. Cooke," and "Advertising a Big Show," were all published in the May 1902 issue of Billposter Display Advertising magazine which graces the front and back covers of this issue.

POWER OF THE POSTER

By Louis E. Cooke, General Agent of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West."

Speaking from a "Wild West" standpoint, the circus poster seems to have been the pioneer of big advertising schemes, and those "reckless spend-thrifts" who went so far as to "absolutely throw away their money" on wood cuts to lavishly advertise the "one ring and no top circus" of long ago, must surely rub the misty past from their eyes, if they have any power of discernment from the great beyond.

Truly the Power of the Poster--the circus poster, I mean--has wielded the greatest influence in the vast world of universal advertisers. One need not grow reminiscent, or evince other signs of senility, if he goes back far enough in the archives of memory to recollect when wood cuts were first used and lithographs for wall work unknown. Gradually these poster pioneers blazed the way for better things. To-day we measure the value of an enterprise by the size and class of its posters; and woe betide the fellow who does not employ the best of printers, the largest posters and the greatest expanse of billboards.

And this leads me up to a few statistical figures--I know figures are tiresome, but they are convincing--to show how much of a swath the circus poster and the circus billposter cuts in the great golden harvest field of advertising.

An Army of Billposters

Taking as an example such shows as Barnum & Bailey, Buffalo Bill, Forepaugh-Sells, Ringling Brothers, Wallace, John Robinson, Walter Main, Lemen Brothers, Sells & Downs, Gentry Brothers, Sipe and others it is within the range of

absolute truth to say that, unitedly, they conduct the largest billposting plant in the world.

Now, brothers of the "Associated," how does that strike you?

Still the proposition "goes as it lays." These great shows, during at least seven months of the year, employ an average of fifty billposters each, making a total of fully 600 men outside of agents, contractors, inspectors, etc. To properly transport, supply and provide for these employees it takes not less than 36 advertising cars, which, in the course of a season, cover every part of the American Continent, and the better part of Europe. These men post upward of 170,000 sheets of paper daily, and as their display of paper usually has a 30 days showing for each day's exhibition, it is safe to estimate that from 5,000,000 to 5,200,000 sheets are "in sight" for six months of the year. Therefore, is it to be wondered why other liberal, progressive advertisers wish to emulate the circus?

Created Fortunes

As a matter of fact, the circus poster has paved the way to massive fortunes, and it stands to-day the greatest teacher in the way of an object lesson in the art of advertising.

How frequently we hear the broad-minded commercial man say, "I would like to cover all of that circus paper." Would he, indeed? Just give him a list of the stands used by one of the big shows in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, or any other city, and see how quickly he will cry: "Oh, I can't stand that!" Still he wishes to imitate the circus method so far as possible. He knows that what caught him will catch others.

The most skillful advertiser realizes that the easiest way to catch the customer is to catch the eye, and the more attractive the "ad" the greater its power to draw trade.



A Barnum & Bailey poster printed by the Courier Company. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals digital collection.

Revolutionized Printing

There is no doubt but that the lavish and successful use of posters by circus managers has brought about a revolution in this kind of printing and thus made it possible to turn out a far better, more artistic class of work at prices fully fifty per cent cheaper than in the olden days. In fact, the finest lithograph posters are now produced for less money than we were wont to pay for the most inferior pine block engravings. All this has redounded to the interest of the billposting fraternity, and should receive the thanks of the commercial world, as it establishes and has made popular a branch of industry at one time considered meretricious.

Incites Newspaper Advertising

And right here I want to say that, in my opinion, it is a mistaken idea that poster work in any way detracts from newspaper advertising. On the contrary I maintain that it incites it. The man that believes in big adver-

tising will carry out that idea in whatever he undertakes. If he believes in a large poster he also likes to see his ad in the newspaper just a little larger and more attractive than any other. I know that is the way I feel, and I have used everything from a hundred sheet lithograph to four pages at one time, in the most influential dailies. It also seems that the newspaper men themselves recognize this truth, as they always make use of the billboard when they want a circulation larger than their own or to give color, form and effect to their thoughts.

In my opinion the Power of the Poster simply represents the Power of the Press, no matter whether that "press" be a four color perfecting, or just a plain flat-bed with four rollers. The more attractive and larger the design is what does the business.

The Poster an Educator

The poster is an educator in the art of advertising. It is not only the "Brass Band," but the whole procession. The circulation is usually limited to the population. Its language brief and convincing. Its very boldness attracts attention, and its modest demeanor on a dead wall commands respect; hence, it is that the circus poster, with all its variegated hues, broad expanse of bosom, and coquettish ways has won its way into commerce and induced promoters of publicity to depend upon it as a search-light looking after business. It brings dollars to your doors. It makes happy homes and enables financiers to declare satisfactory dividends.

TWO BIG SHOWS

Forepaugh-Sells and Buffalo Bill's Wild West play to phenomenal audiences at the Garden.

From the opening of the Forepaugh-Sells Circus on April 2 up to this date Madison Square Garden has been crowded to its utmost capacity with great audiences that have gathered afternoon and evening to see the circus and the "Wild West."

The circus gave 31 entertainments and played to standing room from the beginning to the very last day, April 19. All records were broken.

Buffalo Bill followed on April 21 with the best program that show ever gave. The opening night was

remarkable, for the large attendance of the members of New York's "400." Among the audience were General Miles, General Brooks and Senator Clarke and hundreds of society people in gala attire. A number of new bucking broncos made things unusually lively.

LOUIS E. COOKE

Among the many managers, agents and promoters of big amusement enterprises there are few, if any, who excel Mr. Louis E. Cooke, the subject of the above illustration. Quick in conception, alert in observation, progressive and ingenious in ideas, he possesses all the elements of a successful show manager. He has been instrumental in bringing about some of the most gigantic and successful show transactions ever conceived.

Aside from a thorough knowledge of the amusement business Mr. Cooke is equally apt and practical in other lines. He is a master of the printer's art, having served an apprenticeship and graduated from the case. At present he successfully conducts, as a private enterprise, the only first-class hotel--the Continental--in Newark, N. J., and it is said that he displays a decorative taste in arranging a banquet table that would do honor to a Delmonico.

In business Mr. Cooke is always punctual and precise, and though the interests under his care are vast, he never seems overworked or annoyed, and is always ready to lend a listening ear or a helping hand to a friend.

Those who have met Louis Cooke socially or in business, and he is probably personally acquainted with more people throughout the country than his distinguished principals, will always remember him for his kindly nature. Endowed with a generous spirit and a noble heart he meets all men in a manner that wins their respect and confidence. These characteristics, with his rare business qualifications, have placed Louis Cooke in the high position he occupies to-day.

ADVERTISING A BIG SHOW

Methods employed by the American Circus to draw the dollars.



Lewis E. Cooke. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise credited.

The General Agent and his staff, and how they do their Work. Told by an active Advance Man.

The advance work of a great circus is, in one comprehensive sentence, all that is done before the arrival of the show itself.

It bears the same relationship to the actual exhibition that fertilizing, plowing, harrowing, seeding, cultivating, etc., does to the harvesting, and is, after the selection of the season's route, the most important part of the show business. As this work is performed, good or ill, will be reflected in the results at the ticket wagon.

Therefore, the shrewdest and most experienced men that can be secured for money are put in charge of it.

While the master mind originates, they are the instruments by which his thought is executed. They are the skilled fingers, the pliant muscles, the tireless limbs that move obedient to his will. It is a vast system of intricate and voluminous details requiring numerous agencies and an enormous expenditure of money; and yet its various parts dovetail neatly with each other, working without friction and without waste.

The Advance Staff

The advance staff of one of America's "big shows" usually consists of a General Agent, a Railway

Contractor, an Executive Agent, a General Contracting Agent, an Assistant Contracting Agent; Car No. 1, carrying eighteen to twenty people; first regular advertising Car No. 2, carrying the chief press agent, car manager and twenty to twenty-five men; Car No. 3, carrying from eighteen to twenty men; Car No. 4, carrying a special press agent and car manager and twelve to fourteen men, including "route riders" and special ticket agents; next and finally, the "layer-out," who is one day ahead of the show.



The Buffalo Bill Wild West No. 1 advertising car.

This little army is in charge of the General Agent, who must have a thorough knowledge of the territory to be covered. His work for the coming season begins when the show closes in the fall.

The "Railway Contractor," who is the first to go over the route, is himself a shrewd man of wide experience, who knows more about railways generally than any railway official in the country. The latter is usually the master of but one road, while the circus agent is familiar with the mileage, connections, yard facilities, bridges, tunnels, and other features of every road in the country.

Following the "railway contractor" comes the "Excursion Agent," making special excursion rates on roads leading into show towns. Then another important functionary, the "General Contracting Agent" and his assistant start out and make contracts for feed, lot, accommodations for advance men, livery teams, billboards, everything necessary for both the advance men and the show itself, when they come that way. The contracts of the railway man and the contracting agent involve thousands of dollars per week, and they must pass the rigid scrutiny of the General Agent, who is thoroughly up on all these details. He directs them and

decides knotty points by wire or in person.

How Competition is Met

When another show cuts in on the route, the General Agent sends out car No. 1, which is called the "Skirmishing Car," with its special manager and corps of billposters, who immediately and thoroughly bill these contested towns and the surrounding country. As soon as a railway contractor of an opposition show makes his appearance anywhere the fact is telegraphed to the General

Agent, who thus knows in advance where the other shows are going. Of course each show has the same sources of information and, as a rule, dodge the territory taken by the big show or cut in ahead of it. It is to make this practice dangerous that special work is done long in advance and a fight at once inaugurated.

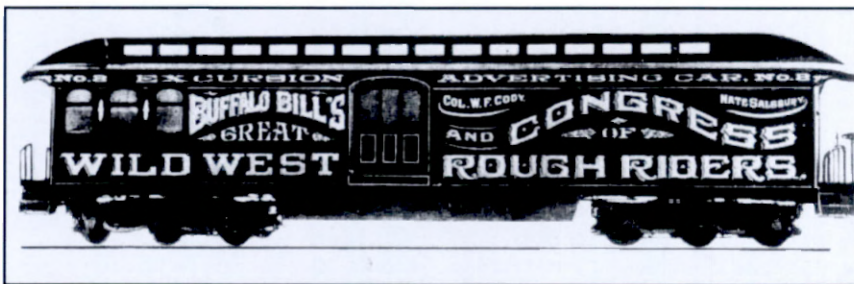
The first step taken is to contract for all the billboards in the show town and the surrounding towns, and to secure all the available barns and fences in the adjacent country. These are covered by men on the "Skirmish Car." In addition to this

show day, but the opposition is taught a lesson and the work and expenditure are justified by ultimate results.

The General Agent sees to the delivery of the printing, and if the "Skirmish Car" should run short warning bills are posted on contracted places. This may be six weeks or even four months ahead. Then, when Car No. 2--the first regular advertising car--comes along on its schedule time, four weeks ahead of the show, the paper is renewed where, destroyed and put up on the vacant contracted places.

The General Agent Gets Busy

When Car No. 2 gets out the work of the General Agent begins to warm up. He establishes a sort of general headquarters in a central city of the district being worked, though he is mostly flying about from point to point and goes back to the show once a week for consultation and to compare notes with his chief. He lives on railway trains and rarely has a bed more than three times a fortnight. At every point telegraphic messages await him and intercept him, run him down and worry him. When he is fortunate enough to stop at a hotel over night he is at the telegraphic desk half the time answering queries, deciding methods of procedure in unforeseen cases, directing the movements of cars, arranging for the delivery of printing at various points--all off hand and with full



The Buffalo Bill Wild West No. 2 advertising car.

banners are printed on muslin and available windows are gobbled up and hung with lithographs, and every advertising device seized upon and utilized. Money is poured out like water. It may cost more cash to do this work than will be taken in on

knowledge of the character of the work and the man at the other end of the wire. If he can't do this safely he must jump the next train and run it down personally. When he is not at the wire he is in his room buried up to the ears in accounts and reports that pour in upon him from all points from the Advance brigade. He is both auditor and paymaster, so far as the



The Barnum & Bailey No. 3 advertising Car.

force is concerned, and all accounts go through him back to the show.

Work of the Advertising Cars

The Car No. 2--the first regular advertising car--runs on schedule time, four weeks ahead of the show, remaining at each town for the same period of time that the show is to stay there. The work its complement of men does is to bill and lithograph every show town and bill the country roads, for from twenty to twenty-four miles out, using livery teams already contracted for. The car moves on to the next town without regard to the men in the country, who may not get back in time, and those left behind follow on the best they can, passes or money and their good clothes being left for them with the station agent. Next day these men will work in town and the others take the country. Car No. 2 also carries the stock of newspaper advertising cuts and prepared advertising matter used by the

The Adam Forepaugh No. 4 advertising car.

general contracting press agent, who keeps pace with it on the route.

The next car is No. 3, which is called the "Excursion Car," and travels two weeks ahead of the show. Its force of eighteen or twenty men bills the railway towns for fifty miles out, putting up the excursion rates contracted for, in addition to the regular paper, and restoring bills destroyed by rain or other causes in the show town. The men left behind when the car moves on follow after as in the case of those left by No. 2.

The last car is No. 4, one week ahead of the show and the force on this car cleans up everything left to do. They exchange tickets for the orders left by those who have preceded them; send out what are known as "route riders," who follow up the work done by former men, both bill-posters and lithograph hangers, and compare it sheet by sheet with the reports, marking every discrepancy and filing a detailed report in turn. The whole advance work is thus checked up, and as no man knows when he is going to be followed the system assures both reasonable accuracy and attention to duty.

Finally, one day ahead of the show,

the "Layer-out," or 24 hour man," makes his appearance. He knows how to get the best out of the show lot, just as the skilled tailor understands how to cut according to his cloth. He sees at a glance the lay of the ground, which must contain at least ten acres to accommodate the required tents, and proceeds to order the forage and other supplies delivered upon the ground.

Quantity of Paper Posted

When the advance work is all done there will be out from 25,000 to 75,000 sheets of pictorial paper, 5,000 to 10,000 in many different kinds of lithograph window work, 100 different kinds of wall paper. Half a dozen different sorts of other publications are used in regular work, and eight or ten in opposition work, besides banners, street car advertising and the expensive newspaper adjuncts. The larger amounts of paper are put out in opposition towns.

There are delightful little reunions here and there along the route, where managers and men cross each other's routes for a night during which even the time-table takes a back seat. A group in front of the hotel will discuss the advance operations for hours. In listening to this one marks the unanimity of earnestness in their work, and the general sympathy in the designs of their great captain. The personal loyalty that shows itself in every movement and expression, and the strong regard for each other held by the advance men reveals the secret of successful advance work. Morning sees these again dispersed--at 6:22 one away, at 7:11 another, or 8:30 or 9:58--resuming time-table life, the alert brained human tentacles that gather in the substance of the land separate to meet again in the same way, they know not when nor where.

The Acme of Advertising

Thus briefly outlined is given our readers a glimpse the greatest and most thoroughly systematic advertising campaign ever executed--a season's work in advance of American circus. In scope, multiplicity of detail in mediums employed, and final results, there is nothing equal or even to compare with it.





The first photo is of the Frank Buck exhibit at the 1939 New York World's Fair. The talker is making the bally, but it doesn't look like he has much of a tip. The elephant is one of the three given to Mr. Buck by the Ringling show in lieu of back wages the previous year. Larry Davis also came over from Ringling to handle these elephants whose names were Yasso, Freida and Sparks Topsy. Davis had been boss elephant man on Ringling until he lost his job to Walter McLain.

Frank "Bring 'Em Back Alive" Buck was very famous as a result of the travelogue movies that featured him as a trapper and importer of wild animals while on safari in Africa. John Ringling North hired him in 1938 and featured him in the spec that had a jungle theme. He simply went around the hippodrome track riding a double howdah carried by two elephants. The illusion was that he had just freshly returned from safari with all these animals including a hippo and a giraffe that had been trained to walk in this pageant. In truth, all the animals were long time Ringling menagerie stock.

I had a glossy portrait of Mr. Buck autographed to my dad, but I have misplaced it. More frustrating to me, however, is trying to figure out when their paths might have crossed. I don't recall my father ever men-



tioned their meeting.

The next two pictures are of something I'll bet most people don't know. Once upon a time Holiday on Ice moved by rail and here is are shots of Arthur Concello's crew modifying the cars. It appears to be two tunnel cars and a coach. On the back of this photo my dad had written "South Venice, Florida," so I assume this was in the general vicinity of the Ringling winter quarters.

Next is a shot of the Riding Conleys on Robbins Bros. Circus in

1949. My family was on this show. It was owned by Big Bob Stevens and previously had been called Bailey Bros. Circus. I was a high steppin' candy butcher working for the A & E Concession Company (Laura Anderson and Congo Frank Ellis).

Other than the Conleys we had the Silverlake family, Jackie Tolliver and Ernest and Percy Clarke who did a comedy fencing act dressed as Musketeers. Skinny Goe had an excellent band.

The boss canvasman was Johnny





Wall and his wife Gladys Gillum, a former lady wrestler, had a small cat act, four or five lions. They called her Killum' Gillum. After her act the Silverlakes did a "Jargo" number (giraffe parody) while the steel arena was coming down. Marcus Silverlake was in the front of the giraffe costume; Franklin was in the back and their father Brownie, in clown make-up and pith helmet, worked the act. He would conclude a long introduction with "Tie him up and turn him loose."

One day for some unknown reason Miss Gillum, while exiting the tent, spied Jargo awaiting its cue and walked over and laughing shot it in the ass with her blank gun. The canvas immediately ignited and Franklin was rushed to the hospital with severe burns.

Robbins Bros. carried a lot of grift and on more than one occasion the last of the trucks pulling off the lot at night was escorted with gun fire. Fortunately the Lucky Boys only worked after the night performance, affording ample time for artists and animals to be gone before all hell broke loose.

I remember a rare two-day stand in Canada where business was so good Big Bob let the grafters work after the first night, resulting in the loss of the second day. We were promptly escorted out of town.

The last image shows the style

wardrobe I once wore. The occasion was our first publicity pictures with the Polack Bros. Circus, taken in Medinah Temple in Chicago. That day was my first introduction to



Parley Baer who handled the press and became a good friend. The elephant is Opal. She had been on Polack for ten years before we arrived and had been trained by the great Mack MacDonald.

As some of you may recall my wife Barbara did the "up and over" with Anna May and when we were with this show, on occasion, we used two elephants, Anna May and Opal side by side. One day we were showing Reno and Slivers and Jo Madison were in the audience. I couldn't resist the temptation to grandstand a little bit, so I decided to use both elephants. On command they both went up on their hind legs and Barbara stood under Anna May and I stood under Opal, and as they both went into their head stands I felt a rip and as I backed out I discovered that my tight pants had parted from eave to bale ring. All I was wearing were two pants legs with eight minutes remaining in the act.

Needless to say I had the audience right in the palm of my hand that day. I tried unsuccessfully to pull the cape around backwards. Slivers stopped by after the show and didn't crack a word, but I could see where he had been wiping the tears away from his face.

My son Shannon had an even worse experience doing the "Up and Over." I'll let him tell it: "I did this trick with Peggy at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo. After about two years she started to get pretty shaky on the hind-leg stand, probably getting nervous with me standing under her. The inevitable happened. As she went from hind-leg stand to a head stand she preceded to pee all over me.

"The band couldn't play another note to save their lives and Pete Sturgis, the ringmaster, lost command of his voice for the remainder of the performance.

"Needless to say, the 'Up and Over' with Peggy was discontinued after that performance."

THE COURIER CO.

SHOW PRINTERS BUFFALO, N.Y.

"WE PRINT THEM"

GRÖSSTES
BESTES GRÖSARTIGSTES
VERGNÜGUNGS
UNTERNEHMEN
AUF DER ERDE.




BARNUM & BAILEY
DER WELT.

GRÖSSTE SCHAUSTELLUNG



3 ZIRKUS.
ABTHEILUNGEN
2 MENAGERIEEN.
OLYMPIA
HIPPODROM.
60 WAGGONS
EISENBAHN-ZÜGE.

DR. PIERCE'S
Favorite
Prescription



W. C. Pierce M.D.
WOMAN'S MEDICAL ADVISER.

MAKES
WEAK WOMEN STRONG
SICK WOMEN WELL.

Immer
Groß
Be



DIE BARNUM & BAILEY
GRÖSSTE SCHAUSTELLUNG DER WELT



DOUBLE DECKERS

THE BIG SHOW




**FOREPAUGH AND
SELLS BROTHERS**



COMING SURE



FASHION



**CUT PLUG
TOBACCO**

CUT PLUG
BEST FOR THE PIPE

ALL BIG ADVERTISERS

